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Abstract

Growing multipolar competition affects the ability of the EU and its member states to formulate and implement common action on crises and conflicts. The effort by the “international community” to ensure global security and peace is weakening due to a divergence in the approaches to crises and conflicts by the major powers, which are often at odds with the EU’s integrated and normative approaches. The increasing involvement of a multitude of major powers and regional players directly affects the EU’s efforts to influence developments in specific regional settings. EU political leverage and/or normative appeal with local actors is eroding and the EU increasingly encounters (state-sponsored) contesters of its policies. At the same time, multipolar competition in crises and conflicts varies considerably across regions and the different major powers play very different roles. Future research should focus on how the EU can engage with different actors across crises and conflicts to mitigate the effects of multipolar competition.

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Introduction

There is vast scholarly consensus that the unchallenged power of the United States has come to an end.¹ The hasty American withdrawal from Afghanistan, with dire security consequences for the country and the region, is only the latest example. The shift to a multipolar world is widely regarded as the result of the growing economic prowess and assertiveness of non-Western countries, most notably China, and the inability of America's foreign policy establishment to forge an enduring consensus on the degree and purpose of US global engagement.² US relative decline, along with its military overstretch, has further compounded said multipolar dynamics. Hence, whereas the US ability to ensure political order in several regions of the world has dwindled, rival powers have become more assertive: China in East and Central Asia but also beyond its own region in Africa and Eastern Europe; Russia in Eastern Europe and the Middle East; Iran in the Middle East.³

The European Union is hugely affected by the increasing multipolar competition, as the Union has historically thrived in the rules-based international order born from the ashes of World War II. The "unipolar moment" of uncontested American hegemony after the end of the Cold War allowed for the extension and deepening of this order, including further European integration itself.⁴ Importantly, European countries relied on the US to provide the hard power needed for the order to function, however imperfectly and irregularly.⁵ Increasing multipolarity thus

¹ Jeffrey Anderson, G. John Ikenberry and Thomas Risse (eds), *The End of the West? Crisis and Change in the Atlantic Order*, Ithaca/London, Cornell University Press, 2008; Graeme P. Herd (ed.), *Great Powers and Strategic Stability in the 21st Century. Competing Visions of World Order*, London/New York, Routledge, 2010; Ian Bremmer, *Every Nation for Itself. Winners and Losers in a G-Zero World*, London, Portfolio/Penguin, 2012; Charles A. Kupchan, *No One's World. The West, the Rising Rest, and the Coming Global Turn*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012; Nathalie Tocci and Riccardo Alcaro, "Rethinking Transatlantic Relations in a Multipolar Era", in *International Politics*, Vol. 51, No. 3 (May 2014), p. 366-389; Riccardo Alcaro, John Peterson and Ettore Greco (eds), *The West and the Global Power Shift. Transatlantic Relations and Global Governance*, Basingstoke/New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

² Riccardo Alcaro (ed.), *The Liberal Order and its Contestations. Great Powers and Regions Transiting in a Multipolar Era*, London/New York, Routledge, 2018.

³ Walter Russell Mead, "The Return of Geopolitics", in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 3 (May/June 2014), p. 69-79.

⁴ Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment", in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 70, No. 1 (1990/1991), p. 23-33.

⁵ Erwan Lagadec, *Transatlantic Relations in the 21st Century. Europe, America and the Rise of the Rest*, London/New York, Routledge, 2012; Sten Rynning, "The False Promise of Continental Concert: Russia, the West and the Necessary Balance of Power", in *International Affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 3 (2015), p.

influences the EU and its ability to pursue its foreign and security policy goals. If EU crisis response and crisis management are not difficult enough, the increased interest of a multitude of major international powers in conflict regions makes it more complicated for the EU to pursue a distinct approach. Against the backdrop of growing multipolarity, this literature review seeks to answer the following question: according to existing scholarship, how does growing multipolar competition affect the ability of the EU and its member states to formulate and implement common action on crises and conflicts?

This literature review finds that, due to multipolarity, the effort by the “international community” to address conflicts is weakening.⁶ This affects the EU’s contribution to conflict management and resolution. We witness, in particular, a divergence in the approaches to crises and conflicts by the major powers, which all too often are at odds with the EU’s “integrated” approach. The integrated approach is defined as multi-dimensional (using all available tools and instruments), multi-phased (acting at all stages of the conflict cycle), multi-level (from local to global), and multi-lateral (engaging all those players present in a conflict).⁷ Yet other major powers often adopt a narrower, short-term approach. The increasing shift of the US away from the liberal peacebuilding paradigm also creates space for other major powers to step in.⁸ The involvement of a multitude of major powers and regional players in different crises and conflicts directly affects the EU’s efforts on the ground. EU political leverage with local governments and other local actors tends to erode when other major powers become more assertive. Furthermore, the EU and its member states increasingly encounter (state-sponsored) actors that adversely contest and challenge crisis and conflict management efforts.⁹


539-552, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12285>; Luis Simón, *The Spectre of a Westphalian Europe?*, London/New York, Routledge, 2018.

⁶ International community principally refers to the efforts of the international institutions (such as UN, EU, OSCE, AU) and informal groupings (Middle East Quartet, North Korea Six-Party Talks, Balkan Contact Group, Iran P5+1) to address crises and conflicts around the world.

⁷ European External Action Service (EEAS), *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy*, June 2016, <https://europa.eu/!Tr66qx>.

⁸ Stephen M. Walt, “The End of Hubris”, in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 98, No. 3 (May/June 2019), p. 26-35; Patrick Porter, *The False Promise of Liberal Order. Nostalgia, Delusion and the Rise of Trump*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2020.

⁹ These are often called “spoilers” in the peace literature. Stephen John Stedman, “Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes”, in *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Fall 1997), p. 5-53. There is furthermore an extensive literature on proxy, hybrid or gray zone warfare or the “sharp” power of China and Russia.



Multipolar competition varies considerably across regions. It is not the same in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), sub-Saharan Africa or Southeast Asia. Also, different major powers, most notably China and Russia, play very different roles. It thus matters exactly which major powers get involved in crises and conflicts and how they do so. Patterns of cooperation followed by the major powers do not ultimately provide credible alternatives to the EU's integrated approach: the US focus on counterterrorism in some conflict regions is considered too narrow, China's investment-driven approach is increasingly problematic for partner countries, and Russia hardly pursues a distinctive model at all. This said, scholars do contend that multipolarity can occasionally provide opportunities for the EU and its efforts to address crises and conflict.

This work starts by reviewing the concepts of multipolarity and multipolar competition, highlighting how such concepts are relevant to our understanding of EU foreign and security policy. It subsequently discusses the relations of the EU and its member states with the US, Russia and China with respect to crises and conflicts. It finally zooms in on existing knowledge on multipolar competition and EU foreign and security policy in various crisis regions.

1. Multipolarity and multipolar competition: Key concepts in the literature

In the 1990s, Charles Krauthammer declared that “multipolarity will come in time. In perhaps another generation or so there will be great powers coequal with the United States, and the world will, in structure, resemble the pre-World War I era.”¹⁰ Over the past decades, economic and geopolitical factors have led to the rise, or resurgence, of countries such as Russia, China and India, thus confirming Krauthammer's prediction. In fact, the presence of China and Russia in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America has undermined the traditional dominance of Western players, such as the US and EU countries.¹¹ As a consequence, questions

¹⁰ Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment”, cit., p. 23-24.

¹¹ Oliver Stuenkel, *Post-Western World. How Emerging Powers Are Remaking Global Order*, Cambridge/Malden, Polity Press, 2016.

concerning the extent to which rising non-Western powers contest the tenets of the existing international order, as well as the extent to which Western powers need to show flexibility in order to maintain elements of the current order, have been raised.¹² Multipolarity and multipolar competition therefore potentially complicate the effort of the “international community” to ensure global security and peace and, by extension, also affect the EU’s approach to crises and conflicts.

Multipolarity can be defined as the global redistribution of power (military, economic, technological, normative) among a growing number of actors.¹³ The scholarly literature on multipolarity discusses how multipolarity not merely involves power, but concerns “a more particularistic approach that fends for a balance of interests, multiplicity of politico-cultural forms and multiple centers of international influence”.¹⁴ Elena Chebankova, for instance, notes that the “idea of a multipolar world order has emerged as Russia’s main ethical and ideological position advanced in the international arena”.¹⁵ Furthermore, scholars have discussed the Chinese push for a multipolar world order since 1990s.¹⁶

Some scholars have argued that multipolarity may bring about “a just and equitable order and contributes to world peace and development” by “curb[ing] hegemonism”.¹⁷ The concept can thus also be viewed through the lens of a

¹² Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, “Conclusion”, in Hedley Bull and Adam Watson (eds), *The Expansion of International Society*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1984, p. 425-435; Elena A. Korosteleva and Trine Flockhart, “Resilience in EU and International Institutions: Redefining Local Ownership in a New Global Governance Agenda”, in *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (2020), p. 153-175, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2020.1723973>.

¹³ Zaki Laïdi, “Towards a Post-Hegemonic World: The Multipolar Threat to the Multilateral Order”, in *International Politics*, Vol. 51, No. 3 (May 2014), p. 350-365.

¹⁴ Elena Chebankova, “Russia’s Idea of the Multipolar World Order: Origins and Main Dimensions”, in *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (2017), p. 217-234 at p. 217.

¹⁵ Ibid. See also Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia’s Foreign Policy. Change and Continuity in National Identity*, 5th ed., Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2019; Paul J. Bolt and Sharyl N. Cross, *China, Russia, and Twenty-First Century Global Geopolitics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018.

¹⁶ Joshua Eisenman and Eric Heginbotham, “Building a More ‘Democratic’ and ‘Multipolar’ World: China’s Strategic Engagement with Developing Countries”, in *China Review*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (November 2019), p. 55-83.

¹⁷ Jing Men, “Changing Ideology in China and Its Impact on Chinese Foreign Policy”, in Sujian Guo and Shiping Hua (eds), *New Dimensions of Chinese Foreign Policy*, New York, Lexington Books, 2007, p. 7-39 at p. 30; Susan Turner, “Russia, China and a Multipolar World Order: The Danger in the Undefined”, in *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (2009), p. 159-184 at p. 168. Jing Men quotes a Chinese official viewpoint: China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *China’s Views on the Development of Multipolarization*, 17 May 2004, available at <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/ceno/eng/wjzc/jbzc/t110844.htm>.

growing equality and influence of emerging powers vis-à-vis traditional Western players. Against this background, scholars who study the concept of “reciprocal socialisation”, whereby the process of absorbing someone else’s norms, worldviews and practices is bi-directional, argue that socialisation is no longer purely driven by Western powers, but rather by several international actors who are, relatively speaking, equally important.¹⁸ So, international norms and practices are increasingly influenced by emerging powers.¹⁹

Multipolarity thus creates new demands for multilateral arrangements when it comes to crises and conflicts and the EU’s efforts in this area. Yet the concepts of multipolarity and multilateralism ought to be distinguished. Multipolarity relates to the distribution, or even fragmentation, of power across more than two great powers. This applies to both material and ideational notions of power. Adam Watson stresses the oscillation between material and normative unipolarity and multipolarity.²⁰ In a similar fashion, Alexander Wendt maintains that multipolarity calls for the coexistence of several powers as states constitute the international system normatively and not just materially.²¹ Amitav Acharya further distinguishes between “multipolarity as a strategic pursuit and multipolarity as a normative quest”.²² Whilst strategic multipolarity is linked to material power (military and economic resources), normative multipolarity is related to ideational factors that can maintain an international order through shared rules, principles and goals at the global level.²³ The accommodation at the global level of norms and practices emanating from different centres of power is inherent to this view, suggesting a different kind of multilateralism to the one dominated by the Western normative

¹⁸ Maximilian Terhalle, “Reciprocal Socialization: Rising Powers and the West”, in *International Studies Perspectives*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (November 2011), p. 341-361; also see Parag Khanna, *The Future is Asian. Commerce, Conflict, and Culture in the 21st Century*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 2019.

¹⁹ Pu Xiaoyu, “Socialisation As a Two-Way Process: Emerging Powers and the Diffusion of International Norms”, in *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (Winter 2012), p. 341-367, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/pos017>; Roy Allison, *Russia, the West, and Military Intervention*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013.

²⁰ Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Society. A Comparative Historical Analysis*, Abingdon, Routledge, 1992, p. 131-132.

²¹ Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics”, in *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (Spring 1992), p. 391-425.

²² Amitav Acharya, “Regional Security Arrangements in a Multipolar World? The European Union in Global Perspective”, in *FES Briefing Papers*, December 2004, p. 2, <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/global/50101.pdf>.

²³ Ibid.

script and in which the EU is accustomed to operate.

Multilateralism refers to the prospects for cooperation between major powers and less powerful countries through international institutions and by extension the ability of the “international community” to address crises and conflicts.²⁴ Because many international institutions, and the international order more broadly, have been established against the background of US primacy in the post-World War II period and particularly the post-Cold War era, multipolarity puts pressure on multilateralism, just like emerging powers put pressure on established powers.²⁵ Multipolarity thus potentially challenges what international institutions and ad hoc groupings such as the North Korea Six-Party Talks (involving North and South Korea, China, Japan, Russia and the US) or the E3/EU+3 Iran group (involving France, Germany, the UK, China, Russia and the US as well as the EU) can do about crises and conflicts. This is not only worrying for the ability of the “international community” to address crises and conflicts, but also affects the EU’s crisis response capacity, because the EU (or its member states) is often a party to international mediation and crisis management efforts.

2. Global level: Implications for European foreign and security policy

We may now shift to consider the relevant scholarly debates on how the EU and its member states interact with other major powers or “poles”, including the US, Russia and China, in an increasingly multipolar environment. The focus is not on great power competition per se, but on how great powers’ relations affect EU foreign and security policy, in particular EU conflict and crisis response. In this respect, the US and China are global actors that affect EU crisis efforts across the globe, whereas Russia is a key power in regions where the EU has much at stake, ranging from Eastern Europe to the MENA. This section highlights a divergence

²⁴ Robert O. Keohane, “Multilateralism: An Agenda for Research”, in *International Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (Autumn 1990), p. 731-764; see Renato Corbetta and William J. Dixon, “Multilateralism, Major Powers, and Militarized Disputes”, in *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (March 2004), p. 5-14; James A. Caporaso, “International Relations Theory and Multilateralism: The Search for Foundations”, in *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (Summer 1992), p. 599-632.

²⁵ Zaki Laïdi, “Towards a Post-Hegemonic World”, cit.

of approaches by the major powers from the EU's integrated and more normative approach.

2.1 The United States

Much of the academic literature on the foreign and security relationship between the EU and the US has been framed through the concepts of dependence and autonomy. On the one hand, most EU member states are dependent on the American (nuclear) umbrella for their security and defence, most notably in the framework of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). On the other hand, there has been a long-held wish for “strategic autonomy” amongst some EU member states, especially France, alongside a demand for increased burden sharing by the US.²⁶ It is crucial to point out the urge of the EU to stand on its own feet and choose its own path, starting with providing security “in its own backyard”. As such, there have been debates about a “division of labour” and how EU foreign and security policy has developed largely alongside US policies. While complementarity between the EU and US remains critical, the academic literature has highlighted a divergence in the approach to (some) crises and conflicts with a decreasing commitment to liberal peacebuilding paradigm by the US.

The discussions about an autonomous European role in the area of crisis response and security go back at least to the period immediately following the Cold War, when European NATO member states promoted a distinct European “security identity”, then failed to end the wars in Yugoslavia, and ultimately created a European (later Common) Security and Defence Policy (ESDP/CSDP) in 1999.²⁷ Barry Posen saw the emerging European security policy as soft-balancing against the US, arguing that the “concentration of global power in the United States, unipolarity, is uncomfortable even for its friends”.²⁸ Jolyon Howorth and Anand Menon, on the contrary, contended that an international institution such as the

²⁶ Roland Dannreuther and John Peterson (eds), *Security Strategy and Transatlantic Relations*, London/New York, Routledge, 2006; Steven MacGuire and Michael Smith, *The European Union and the United States. Competition and Convergence in the Global Arena*, Basingstoke/New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

²⁷ Jolyon Howorth, *Security and Defence Policy in the European Union*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

²⁸ Barry R. Posen, “European Union Security and Defense Policy: Response to Unipolarity?”, in *Security Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (2010), p. 149-186 at p. 149, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636410600829356>.

EU cannot be a vehicle for soft-balancing, as attested by the lack of ambition (and resources) sustaining the CSDP.²⁹ Writing 16 years earlier, Christopher Hill had stated that one of Europe's key roles in foreign affairs is to be a "second Western voice", instead of a separate pole.³⁰

Throughout the 2000s and 2010s, American-led state and peacebuilding projects put considerable demands on European security. During the George W. Bush Administration (2001–09), the US initially adopted the criterion that "the mission determine[d] the coalition",³¹ but at times seemed to follow the logic of, as Robert Kagan put it, "the United States 'making the dinner' and the Europeans 'doing the dishes'".³² What "doing the dishes" meant became clear during the prolonged Afghanistan war, which over time drained the military capacities of many European allies as well as their political will to fight and engage in large military operations.³³ Scholars have delved into division of labour and burden-sharing issues under President Barack Obama (2009–17), who initiated a "pivot to Asia" of US foreign policy with the expectation that the Europeans would take greater responsibility for their own neighbourhood. Eventually, the limited involvement of the US in the aftermath of the Arab uprising, the vital support the US gave to France, the UK and other European countries during the intervention in Libya (which a US official framed as "leading from behind") and the bloody civil war in Syria effectively underlined EU responsibilities and a need for autonomy.³⁴

The year 2016 paved the way for a change in the international system, due to the election as US president of President Donald Trump, an advocate of an "America

²⁹ Jolyon Howorth and Anand Menon, "Still Not Pushing Back: Why the European Union Is Not Balancing the United States", in *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 53, No. 5 (October 2009), p. 727-744.

³⁰ Christopher Hill, "The Capability-Expectations Gap, or Conceptualizing Europe's International Role", in *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (1993), p. 305-328 at p. 311.

³¹ Donald Rumsfeld, "Rumsfeld's Pentagon News Conference", in *The Washington Post*, 18 October 2001, https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/rumsfeld_text101801.html.

³² Robert Kagan, "Power and Weakness", in *Policy Review*, No. 113 (June-July 2002), p. 3-28 at p. 8, <https://www.hoover.org/research/power-and-weakness>.

³³ David P. Auerswald and Stephen M. Saideman, *NATO in Afghanistan. Fighting Together, Fighting Alone*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2014.

³⁴ Ellen Hallams and Benjamin Schreer, "Towards a 'Post-American' Alliance? NATO Burden-Sharing After Libya", in *International Affairs*, Vol. 88, No. 2 (March 2012), p. 313-327.

First” approach. Marianne Riddervold and Akasemi Newsome found in the election of Trump “strong evidence to suggest that EU-US relations [were] weakening”.³⁵ Trump’s overt scepticism towards NATO, and long-term strategic alliances in general, his “transactional bilateralism”, the hostility toward European integration and multilateral institutions, his refusal to challenge Russian President Vladimir Putin, and his overall unpredictability did in fact raise profound questions about the lingering relevance of “the West”.³⁶ As a consequence of the Trump Administration approach, two key debates gained traction amongst scholars. First, the debate on transatlantic burden-sharing and the extent to which various metrics, such as the NATO commitment to spending 2 per cent of GDP in defence, are actually useful.³⁷ Second, the debate on a need for EU strategic autonomy as promoted in the EU Global Strategy of 2016 and its various implementation reports.³⁸ Both debates revolve around how EU member states can meaningfully improve their capabilities and create synergies amongst themselves, to play a more equal role within NATO and carry out security and defence tasks in line with EU interests. The withdrawal from Afghanistan has resulted in further proposals for EU strategic autonomy being channelled into the ongoing negotiations on the EU Strategic Compass. These debates are particularly pronounced among European think

³⁵ Marianne Riddervold and Akasemi Newsome, “Transatlantic Relations in Times of Uncertainty: Crises and EU-US Relations”, in *Journal of European Integration*, Vol. 40, No. 5 (2018), p. 505-521 at p. 505, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2018.1488839>.

³⁶ For NATO see Joyce P. Kaufman, “The US Perspective on NATO Under Trump: Lessons of the Past and Prospects for the Future”, in *International Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 2 (March 2017), p. 251-266, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iix009>; James Sperling and Mark Webber, “Trump’s Foreign Policy and NATO: Exit and Voice”, in *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (July 2019), p. 511-526, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210519000123>; for transatlantic bilateralism see Doug Stokes, “Trump, American Hegemony and the Future of the Liberal International Order”, in *International Affairs*, Vol. 94, No. 1 (January 2018), p. 133-150, https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/images/ia/INTA94_1_8_238_Stokes.pdf; Graham K. Wilson, “Brexit, Trump and the Special Relationship”, in *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (August 2017), p. 543-557; Klaus Larres and Ruth Wittlinger, “A Fragile Friendship: German-American Relations in the Twenty-First Century”, in *German Politics*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (2018), p. 152-157, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2018.1429412>; for hostility towards the European project see Ben Rhodes, “Trump is Hostile to Europe”, in *Berlin Policy Journal*, 3 January 2019, <https://berlinpolicyjournal.com/?p=7743>; for unpredictability see Michelle Bentley and Maxine David, “Unpredictability As Doctrine: Reconceptualising Foreign Policy Strategy in the Trump Era”, in *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (2021), p. 383-406.

³⁷ Benjamin Zyla, *Sharing the Burden? NATO and Its Second-Tier Powers*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2015; Dominika Kunertova, “One Measure Cannot Trump It All: Lessons from NATO’s Early Burden-Sharing Debates”, in *European Security*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (2017), p. 552-574; Leonard August Schuette, “Toward a Meaningful Metric: Replacing NATO’s 2% Defence Spending Target”, in *Security Policy Briefs*, No. 142 (March 2021), <https://www.egmontinstitute.be/?p=38910>.

³⁸ Daniel Fiott, “Strategic Autonomy: Towards ‘European Sovereignty’ in Defence?”, in *EUISS Briefs*, No. 12 (November 2018), <https://www.iss.europa.eu/node/2292>.

tank and policy communities, yet academics too continue to be critical of the EU's ability to provide security and engage meaningfully in crises and conflicts without the participation of the United States.³⁹

The new US president, Joe Biden, represents a shift in comparison with Trump, even accounting for his decisions to withdraw from Afghanistan in August 2021 without prior consultation with the European allies and strike a security agreement with Australia and the United Kingdom (the AUKUS deal) to the detriment of a previous Australian-French military procurement arrangement.⁴⁰ These two incidents demonstrate that even with a president with strong Atlanticist instincts such as Biden international (and transatlantic) relations have moved on.⁴¹ The Biden Administration's almost exclusive focus on China has resulted in the US-Chinese rivalry becoming the single most powerful shaper of America's foreign and security policy. The US liberal peacebuilding project has largely been recalibrated, with a number of US scholars calling for a policy of restraint.⁴² Simultaneously, scholars have noted, in several conflicts, an increased prominence of narrow counterterrorism interventions, including through drones, one-off air strikes and special forces in US security policy over the last decade.⁴³ This is a divergence from the EU's integrated approach, which still aligns with many of the tenets of the peacebuilding paradigm, including the multi-dimensional, multi-phased, multi-level, and multi-lateral elements of it.

³⁹ Benjamin Schreer, "Trump, NATO and the Future of Europe's Defence", in *The RUSI Journal*, Vol. 164, No. 1 (2019), p. 10-17; Hugo Meijer and Stephen G. Brooks, "Illusions of Autonomy: Why Europe Cannot Provide for Its Security If the United States Pulls Back", in *International Security*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (Spring 2021), p. 7-43, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00405.

⁴⁰ Joseph R. Biden, "Why America Must Lead Again", in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 99, No. 2 (March/April 2020), p. 64-76, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/node/1125464>.

⁴¹ Sara Bjerg Moller and Sten Rynning, "Revitalizing Transatlantic Relations: NATO 2030 and Beyond", in *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (Spring 2021), p.177-197; Steven Blockmans, "EU-US Relations: Reinventing the Transatlantic Agenda", in *Intereconomics*, Vol. 56, No.1 (January 2021), p. 5-7, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10272-021-0943-3>.

⁴² Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, "Misplaced Restraint: The Quincy Coalition Versus Liberal Internationalism", in *Survival*, Vol. 63, No. 4 (2021), p. 7-32, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2021.1956187>.

⁴³ Thomas Waldman, "Vicarious Warfare: The Counterproductive Consequences of Modern American Military Practice", in *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (2018), p. 181-205; Andreas Krieg, "Externalizing the Burden of War: The Obama Doctrine and US Foreign Policy in the Middle East", in *International Affairs*, Vol. 92, No. 1 (January 2016), p. 97-113; Ruben Andersson and Florian Weigand, "Intervention at Risk: The Vicious Cycle of Distance and Danger in Mali and Afghanistan", in *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (2015), p. 519-541, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2015.1054655>.

2.2 Russia

The annexation of Crimea by Russia in defiance of international law is widely seen as the “culmination of a long-term crisis in EU-Russia relations”, which has revolved around the question of Russia’s place in the European security governance.⁴⁴ The EU’s resolve to sanction Russia for its challenge to the European security order came about as a surprise after years of disagreement among the EU member states about the bloc’s Russia policy.⁴⁵ Scholars have explained this convergence of positions of EU member states either through a normative lens – as a result of “the normative force of the arguments presented” in defence of a nation’s (Ukraine’s) right to self-determination – or through an institutionalist lens as the product of the complex interplay between EU level decision-making and domestic politics opening institutional opportunities for consensus.⁴⁶ Beyond Ukraine, Russia has clashed with the EU in other parts of Eastern Europe (notably Belarus and Moldova), the Western Balkans (Serbia) and the MENA (especially Syria and Libya). It has resisted, if not opposed altogether, the EU’s security and diplomatic role, the EU’s regulatory outreach based on the single market, and the EU’s normative power based on the promotion of the liberal democratic model.⁴⁷

Russia’s policies in the last decade and EU responses to them have increasingly been interpreted as evidence of the “rise of geopolitics” and a shift towards a more

⁴⁴ Hiski Haukkala, “From Cooperative to Contested Europe? The Conflict in Ukraine as a Culmination of a Long-term Crisis in EU–Russia Relations”, in *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (2015), p. 25-40; Derek Averre, “The Ukraine Conflict: Russia’s Challenge to European Security Governance”, in *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 68, No. 4 (2016), p. 699-725.

⁴⁵ Clara Portela et al., “Consensus Against All Odds: Explaining the Persistence of EU Sanctions on Russia”, in *Journal of European Integration*, Vol. 43, No. 6 (2021), p. 683-699, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2020.1803854>.

⁴⁶ Helene Sjørnsen and Guri Rosén, “Arguing Sanctions. On the EU’s Response to the Crisis in Ukraine”, in *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (January 2017), p. 20-36; Michal Natorki and Karolina Pomorska, “Trust and Decision-making in Times of Crisis: The EU’s Response to the Events in Ukraine”, in *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (January 2017), p. 54-70.

⁴⁷ For EU’s security and diplomatic role see Nicu Popescu, *EU Foreign Policy and Post-Soviet Conflicts. Stealth Intervention*, London/New York, Routledge, 2011; Simon Duke and Carmen Gebhard, “The EU and NATO’s Dilemmas With Russia and the Prospects for Deconfliction”, in *European Security*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (2017), p. 379-397. For EU’s regulatory outreach see Rilka Dragneva and Kataryna Wolczuk, “The Eurasian Economic Union. Deals, Rules and the Exercise of Power”, in *Chatham House Research Papers*, May 2017, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/node/22283>. For liberal democratic model see Roland Dannreuther, “Russia and the Arab Spring: Supporting the Counter-Revolution”, in *Journal of European Integration*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (2015), p. 77-94; Gergana Noutcheva, “Whose Legitimacy? The EU and Russia in Contest for the Eastern Neighbourhood”, in *Democratization*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (2018), p. 312-330, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2017.1363186>.

strategic EU approach to Russia.⁴⁸ Scholars see this “pragmatic turn” as encoded in the EU’s 2016 Global Strategy, which shifted away from value promotion and towards the prioritisation of stability and security, including strengthening the resilience of societies and states around the EU.⁴⁹ Others acknowledge the ongoing ideational contestation between the EU and Russia and assert the continuing relevance of the normative dimension in the bilateral relationship.⁵⁰ Significant parts of the literature points to a shift from a cooperative to a conflictual dynamic as the central undertone of EU-Russia relations.⁵¹

Russia’s motivations to contest the EU and the West more generally has mostly been associated with “its feeling of being ill-accommodated in the present [liberal international] order”, its “anti-hegemonic reaction against [...] the Western imposition of norms”, or its “ambiguous position between East and West”, making it sit uncomfortably between Europeanness and Eurasianism.⁵² Most scholars see a security rationale behind Russia’s actions and reject an ideological motivation, citing the absence of a normative alternative represented by Russia, even if Russia

⁴⁸ Richard Youngs, *Europe’s Eastern Crisis. The Geopolitics of Asymmetry*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017; Cristian Nitoiu and Monika Sus, “Introduction: The Rise of Geopolitics in the EU’s Approach in its Eastern Neighbourhood”, in *Geopolitics*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (2018), p. 1-19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2019.1544396>.

⁴⁹ EEAS, *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe*, cit.; Ana E. Juncos, “Resilience as the New EU Foreign Policy Paradigm: A Pragmatist Turn?”, in *European Security*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2017), p. 1-18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2016.1247809>; Nathalie Tocci, “Resilience and the Role of the European Union in the World”, in *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (2020), p. 176-194.

⁵⁰ Kristi Raik, “The Ukraine Crisis as a Conflict over Europe’s Political, Economic and Security Order”, in *Geopolitics*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (2019), p. 51-70; Gergana Noutcheva, “Normative Power in the Eastern Neighbourhood”, in Roberta N. Haar et al. (eds), *The Making of European Security Policy. Between Institutional Dynamics and Global Challenges*, London/New York, Routledge, 2021, p. 28-45.

⁵¹ Fyodor Lukyanov, “Russia–EU: The Partnership That Went Astray”, in *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 60, No. 6 (2008), p. 1107-1119; Hiski Haukkala, “From Cooperative to Contested Europe?”, cit; Vsevolod Samokhvalov, “Ukraine Between Russia and the European Union: Triangle Revisited”, in *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 67, No. 9 (2015), p. 1371-1393; Tom Casier, “From Logic of Competition to Conflict: Understanding the Dynamics of EU–Russia Relations”, in *Contemporary Politics*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (2016), p. 376-394; Laure Delcour, “Dealing With the Elephant in the Room: The EU, Its ‘Eastern Neighbourhood’ and Russia”, in *Contemporary Politics*, Vol. 24, No.1 (2018), p. 14-29.

⁵² For liberal international order see Tatiana Romanova, “Russia’s Neorevisionist Challenge to the Liberal International Order”, in *The International Spectator*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (March 2018), p. 76-91 at p. 76; for Western norms see Tom Casier, “Russia and the Diffusion of Political Norms: The Perfect Rival?”, in *Democratization*, 25 May 2021, p. 1, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2021.1928078>; for Europeanness and Eurasianism see Elena Korosteleva and Zachary Paikin, “Russia Between East and West, and the Future of Eurasian Order”, in *International Politics*, Vol. 58, No. 3 (June 2021), p. 321-333 at p. 326, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-020-00261-5>.

may defend norms in its foreign policy, or claims to do so.⁵³ Russia's contestation of the liberal international order and its quest for a great power status can yet be seen as a struggle for asserting a distinct international identity.⁵⁴

2.3 China

China's economic rise, alongside its increasingly assertive foreign policy, poses substantial dilemmas for EU foreign and security policy, the reach of European norms and the nature of the international system. In a 2019 Joint Communication of the European Commission and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, China was labelled not only as “a cooperation partner”, “a negotiation partner” and “an economic competitor” in differing policy areas, but also a “systemic rival”.⁵⁵ The meaning of this phrase has multiple connotations. Firstly, it can be interpreted as being softer than the US–China “strategic rivalry”, with the EU attempting to keep political criticism separated from economic cooperation with China.⁵⁶ Secondly, scholars have pointed at potential regulatory rivalry between the two powers. Both the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and EU external relations aim to shape the rules and normative orbits of the Eurasian supercontinent.⁵⁷ Thirdly, it may aim to highlight differences between the EU and China on the question of political systems, stressing divergent perspectives on human rights, domestic governance and – increasingly – external transparency.

Admittedly, China's foreign policy aims are a matter of contention.⁵⁸ Some authors argue that Beijing pursues a long-term strategy to replace the US-led

⁵³ Tatiana Romanova, “Russia's Neorevisionist Challenge to the Liberal International Order”, cit.; Tom Casier, “Russia and the Diffusion of Political Norms”, cit.; Roland Dannrether, “Understanding Russia's Return to the Middle East”, in *International Politics*, Vol. 56, No. 6 (December 2019), p. 726-742.

⁵⁴ Dmitri Trenin, “Russia's Changing Identity: In Search of a Role in the 21 Century”, in *Carnegie Moscow Centre Commentaries*, 18 July 2019, <https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/79521>.

⁵⁵ European Commission and High Representative of the Union, *EU-China – A Strategic Outlook*, JOIN/2019/5, 12 March 2019, p.1, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52019JC0005>.

⁵⁶ Bruno Maçães, “Surprise! The EU Knows How to Handle China”, in *Politico*, 22 June 2021, <https://www.politico.eu/?p=1748598>.

⁵⁷ Steven Blockmans and Weinian Hu, “The Belt and Road in the Single Market: Towards an EU Legal Infrastructure to Address the Regulatory Implications”, in Vassilis Ntousas and Stephen Minas (eds), *The European Union and China's Belt and Road. Impact, Engagement and Competition*, London/New York, Routledge, 2022, p. 60-75.

⁵⁸ Jeanne-Marie Gescher, *Becoming China. The Story Behind the State*, London, Bloomsbury, 2017.

international order with another more to its liking.⁵⁹ Others conceptualise China as a “partial power”,⁶⁰ noting that Beijing “would settle for peaceful coexistence with democratic capitalism”, rather than aspire for a position of leadership in the international order.⁶¹ Regardless, as other Asian economies grow with younger societies rising (from India to the Philippines), Asia itself will become multipolar and thus constrain China’s power.⁶² Furthermore, China’s gradual “de-alienation” from the wider international order in the post-Mao period has allowed it to become “socialised” into international norms, “whereby international society gradually took China into its embrace with necessary adjustments”.⁶³ On the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in June 2021, President Xi Jinping advocated for accelerating the modernisation of China’s defence forces, strengthening the party’s “firm leadership” and rejecting “sanctimonious preaching” from the West. Simultaneously, he stated that China does not possess “aggressive or hegemonic traits”.⁶⁴ Taking Xi’s words at face value, some scholars describe Chinese foreign policy as self-interested rather than geared toward advancing a conceptually developed alternative international order. For instance, the BRI is just as much about cementing Beijing’s control over Xinjiang (China’s western region, home to the Muslim and Turkic minority of the Uyghurs) as it is about challenging Western values or extending its influence across Eurasia.⁶⁵

The existent literature has also contended that China does not pose a military threat to Europe, in part due to geographical distance. The problem for the EU is that China attempts to redefine international norms with authoritarian

⁵⁹ Rush Doshi, *The Long Game. China’s Grand Strategy and the Displacement of American Order*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2021.

⁶⁰ David L. Shambaugh, *China Goes Global. The Partial Power*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013.

⁶¹ Paul Heer, “Why the ‘Longer Telegram’ Won’t Solve the China Challenge”, in *The National Interest*, 1 February 2021, <https://nationalinterest.org/node/177404>.

⁶² Parag Khanna, *The Future is Asian*, cit.

⁶³ Yongjin Zhang, *China in International Society Since 1949. Alienation and Beyond*, New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1998, p. 61. See also Ian Clark, “International Society and China: The Power of Norms and the Norms of Power”, in *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Autumn 2014), p. 315-340.

⁶⁴ Xi Jinping, *Speech at a Ceremony Marking the Centenary of the Communist Party of China*, Beijing, 1 July 2021, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2021-07/01/c_1310038244.htm.

⁶⁵ Daniel S. Markey, *China’s Western Horizon. Beijing and the New Geopolitics of Eurasia*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020.

characteristics. It challenges EU foreign and security policy through its economic practices, development strategies in the various regions around the EU, invasive cyberattacks and engagement in joint military exercises with Russia.⁶⁶ Because of Russia's location on the European continent, the Sino-Russian partnership poses a unique challenge and threat to the EU.

Chinese investment in Europe and other forms of Sino-European interactions potentially constrain EU foreign and security policy, as they risk causing internal splits among the member states. Threats emerging in the realm of technology have stirred heated debates among EU countries and between EU countries and the US. At the same time, China's actions in this field have also created impetus for further EU and transatlantic coordination.⁶⁷ These debates have covered not only cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns, but also the use of Chinese 5G technology in EU telecom markets.⁶⁸ Besides, China has tried to sow disunity among the EU27. Tools employed by Beijing include "wolf warrior" diplomacy, the spread of its BRI to member states such as Italy and Greece, and the so-called "16+1" cooperation format with Central and Eastern European countries.⁶⁹ While such Chinese actions, including the BRI in Europe, may have partially backfired, these developments illustrate how the dimensions of EU internal disunity and multipolarity are interrelated.

3. Regional level: Implications for European foreign and security policy

This final part of the literature review is concerned with the effects of multipolar competition in various regions. This section reviews how, in particular regional conflicts, EU policies and actions are affected by other international actors. It

⁶⁶ Andrea Kendall-Taylor and David O. Shullman, "China and Russia's Dangerous Convergence", in *Foreign Affairs*, 3 May 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/node/1127477>.

⁶⁷ Pierre Morcos, "NATO's Pivot to China: A Challenging Path", in *CSIS Commentaries*, 8 June 2021, <https://www.csis.org/node/61164>.

⁶⁸ Alexander Gabuev, "As Russia and China Draw Closer, Europe Watches with Foreboding", in *Carnegie Moscow Center Commentaries*, 19 March 2021, <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/84135>.

⁶⁹ Peter Martin, *China's Civilian Army. The Making of Wolf Warrior Diplomacy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2021; Li Xing (ed.), *China-EU Relations in a New Era of Global Transformation*, London/New York, Routledge, 2022.

highlights a weakening of the “international community”, divergent approaches to crises and conflict, reduced EU leverage in dealing with local governments and actors and increased state-sponsored actions that actively undermine EU policies.

3.1 Eastern Europe

The Eastern European regional setting is largely defined by competition between the EU and Russia over the fate of the countries in-between. Through the offer of partial integration into the single market, Brussels has tried to anchor the economic trajectories of its eastern neighbours into its own regulatory space and to model the political regimes of the eastern European countries on its own liberal democratic system. Moscow has fought back, sensing a loss of power in what it perceives as its privileged sphere of influence, and has stepped up its game through counteroffers to the neighbours, or threats and even outright aggression.

Research has focused on exposing the differences in the approaches of the two actors. Russia has been mostly depicted as a “negative actor” and disruptor of order, a geopolitical actor that pursues its interests at the expense of those of the neighbours. Some scholars contend that, precisely because of the aggressive nature of its policies, Russia has unintentionally played a democratisation role in the neighbourhood, as it has strengthened the resolve of the pro-EU and pro-reform constituencies in the post-Soviet space to resist pressure from Moscow and integrate further with the West.⁷⁰ The EU has more often been portrayed as an actor pursuing a transformative agenda for the greater benefit of the neighbourhood even if the impact of its policies has not always been the one that was expected.⁷¹ The emphasis has mostly been on how these two actors’ policies clash on the ground and present policy dilemmas for the countries concerned.⁷²

⁷⁰ Jacok Tolstrup, “Studying a Negative External Actor: Russia’s Management of Stability and Instability in the ‘Near Abroad’”, in *Democratization*, Vol. 16, No. 5 (2009), p. 922-944; Richard Youngs, *Europe’s Eastern Crisis*, cit.; Laure Delcour and Kataryna Wolczuk, “Spoiler or Facilitator of Democratization? Russia’s Role in Georgia and Ukraine” in *Democratization*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (2015), p. 459-478, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2014.996135>.

⁷¹ Tanja A. Börzel and Frank Schimmelfennig, “Coming Together or Drifting Apart? The EU’s Political Integration Capacity in Eastern Europe”, in *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 24, No.2 (2017), p. 278-296; Tanja A. Börzel and Bidzina Lebanidze, “‘The Transformative Power of Europe’ Beyond Enlargement: The EU’s Performance in Promoting Democracy in its Neighbourhood”, in *East European Politics*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (2017), p. 17-35.

⁷² Elena Gnedina, “‘Multi-Vector’ Foreign Policies in Europe: Balancing, Bandwagoning or

The EU's approach to Eastern Europe has been analysed as part of the scholarship on the Eastern Partnership (EaP) and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The EaP and the ENP have been examined from different perspectives: as security-driven initiatives intended to protect the EU's own security, as technocratic responses conditioned on the peculiarities of the Brussels bureaucracy, or yet as normative projects with a neo-imperialist touch.⁷³ Scholars have also reflected on the EU's instruments to project power in Eastern Europe. The external governance perspective has been dominant in this context, conceptualising the EU's partial integration offer to the neighbours as an extension of its internal rules, standards and norms.⁷⁴ Scholars have largely been sceptical of the EU's ability to incentivise political and economic reform through its "conditionality-lite" approach.⁷⁵

In contrast, Russia's policy has been analysed mostly as an attempt to counter Western hegemony in the region.⁷⁶ Moscow's assertiveness in regaining dominance over the post-Soviet space – including through the use of coercive means – has attracted most of the scholarly attention, although the normative aspects of Russia's foreign policy have been acknowledged too.⁷⁷ Indeed, Russia's launch of the Eurasian Economic Union has not only been discussed as an attempt to rival the EU in the area of regulatory norm-setting, but also as an alternative economic

Bargaining?", in *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 67, No. 7 (2015), p. 1007-1029; Vsevolod Samokhvalov, "Ukraine Between Russia and the European Union", cit.

⁷³ Assem Dandashly, "EU Democracy Promotion and the Dominance of the Security–Stability Nexus", in *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (2018), p. 62-82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2017.1358900>; Gergana Noutcheva, "Institutional Governance of European Neighbourhood Policy in the Wake of the Arab Spring", in *Journal of European Integration*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (2015), p. 19-36.

⁷⁴ Sandra Lavenex and Frank Schimmelfennig, "EU Rules Beyond EU Borders: Theorizing External Governance in European Politics", in *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 16, No. 6 (2009), p. 791-812, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501760903087696>; Sandra Lavenex, "The Power of Functionalist Extension: How EU Rules Travel", in *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 21, No. 6 (2014), p. 885-903.

⁷⁵ Gwendolyn Sasse, "The European Neighbourhood Policy: Conditionality Revisited for the EU's Eastern Neighbours", in *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (March 2008), p. 295-316; Tanja A. Börzel and Frank Schimmelfennig, "Coming Together or Drifting Apart?", cit.

⁷⁶ Iver B. Neumann, "Russia's Europe, 1991-2016: Inferiority to Superiority", in *International Affairs*, Vol. 92, No.6 (November 2016), p. 1381-1399; Richard Sakwa, *Russia Against the Rest. The Post-Cold War Crisis of World Order*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017.

⁷⁷ Roy Allison, "Russia and the Post-2014 International Legal Order: Revisionism and Realpolitik", in *International Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 3 (May 2017), p. 519-543; Andrei Tsygankov, "Vladimir Putin's Last Stand: The Sources of Russia's Ukraine Policy", in *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (2015), p. 279-303; Richard Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine. Crisis in the Borderlands*, London/New York, I.B. Tauris, 2015; Tom Casier, "The EU–Russia Strategic Partnership: Challenging the Normative Argument", in *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 65, No. 7 (2013), p. 1377-1395; Gergana Noutcheva, "Whose Legitimacy?", cit.

integration path for the EU's eastern neighbours, mimicking the EU's own regional integration initiative.⁷⁸

While the eastern neighbourhood is mostly studied through the EU-Russia lens, China has recently inserted itself into the region through the BRI as well as trade and infrastructure investment promises to Eastern Partnership countries.⁷⁹ While it does not have major interests in the region, China's policies have implications for regional politics. China may help Eastern European countries “hedge against Russia” by diversifying their trade patterns and reducing their vulnerability to Russia's trade sanctions.⁸⁰ Yet, China's implicit support for the authoritarian governments in the region undercuts the EU's normative agenda.⁸¹

3.2 Middle East and North Africa

The Middle East and North Africa region has been characterised by continuous violence since especially the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. With the Arab uprisings in 2011, instability has increased and interstate rivalries have worsened. In addition to the major powers, regional players have expanded their presence and influence. In this regard, the MENA has witnessed two main developments. First, the US role has declined along with its decreasing liberal peacebuilding approach and its increased focus on restraint, counterterrorism drone attacks, etc. Second, the increased rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia, but also between Turkey and Qatar (on one side) and Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (on the other side) has resulted in a more acute tensions and a more fragmented region.⁸²

⁷⁸ Rilka Dragneva and Kataryna Wolczuk, “The Eurasian Economic Union”, cit.; Gergana Noutcheva, “Normative Power in the Eastern Neighbourhood”, cit.

⁷⁹ Michal Makocki, “China, the New Silk Road and the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood”, in Nicu Popescu and Stanislav Secieru (eds), “Third Powers in Europe's East”, in *Chaillot Papers*, No. 144 (March 2018), p. 21-28, <https://www.iss.europa.eu/node/2212>.

⁸⁰ Thomas S. Eder, “Chinese Approaches to the Eastern Neighbourhood”, in Nicu Popescu and Stanislav Secieru (eds), “Third Powers in Europe's East”, in *Chaillot Papers*, No. 144 (March 2018), p. 13-20 at p. 20, <https://www.iss.europa.eu/node/2212>.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Mehran Kamrava, “Multipolarity and Instability in the Middle East”, in *Orbis*, Vol. 62, No. 4 (2018), p. 598-616.

Major international powers have only partially filled the political and/or military space left by the US. The EU's main concern in the region relates to economic, security and lately migration control interests.⁸³ China's objectives are mostly economic, while Russia's geopolitical interests lie in backing its ally President Bashar al-Assad in Syria and more recently also inserting itself into Libya's political transition.⁸⁴ The EU's reaction has been characterised by conflicts of interest among member states, most notably between Italy and France over Libya. This "global and regional context has in turn prompted local aspirants to become more assertive in foreign and security policy pursuits, [competing] with one another for greater influence and even regional hegemony", in an attempt of pushing their policies and expand into the Mediterranean region.⁸⁵ Amongst these regional actors one can highlight the influence of Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates.⁸⁶ However, these countries are driven by conflict and rivalries. Hence, it is possible to state that both international and regional players "compete for influence and settle accounts".⁸⁷

The absence of a hegemonic power in the MENA, with international players continuously meddling and regional powers such as Turkey or Saudi Arabia and the Emirates following their own separate path, increases instability, resulting in aggravated insecurity at the EU's borders, alongside heavier migration flows.⁸⁸

⁸³ Assem Dandashly, "The European Union's Response to the Syrian Conflict. Too Little, Too Late ...", in *Global Affairs*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (2016), p. 397-400; Nicole Koenig, "Libya and Syria: Inserting the European Neighbourhood Policy in the European Union's Crisis Response Cycle", in *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (2017), p. 19-38; Stratfor, "France and Italy Each Go Their Own Way on Libya", in *Worldview*, 5 September 2018.

⁸⁴ Assem Dandashly, "EU Democracy Promotion and the Dominance of the Security–Stability Nexus", cit.

⁸⁵ Mehran Kamrava, "Multipolarity and Instability in the Middle East", cit., p. 599. See also Silvia Colombo and Eduard Soler i Lecha, "Europe and the 'New' Middle East", in *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (2021), p. 403-422, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2021.1888246>; Raffaella A. Del Sarto, Helle Malmvig and Eduard Soler i Lecha, "Interregnum: The Regional Order in the Middle East and North Africa After 2011", in *MENARA Final Reports*, No. 1 (February 2019), <https://www.iai.it/en/node/10019>.

⁸⁶ Jordi Quero and Andrea Dessì, "Unpredictability in US Foreign Policy and the Regional Order in the Middle East: Reacting vis-à-vis a Volatile External Security-Provider", in *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (2021), p. 311-330, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2019.1580185>.

⁸⁷ Hussein Agha and Robert Malley, "This Is Not a Revolution", in *The New York Review*, 8 November 2012, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2012/11/08/not-revolution>.

⁸⁸ Karim Makdisi, "Intervention and the Arab Uprisings: From Transformation to Maintenance of Regional Order", in Rasmus Alenius Boserup et al. (eds), *New Conflict Dynamics. Between Regional Autonomy and Intervention in the Middle East and North Africa*, Copenhagen, Danish Institute

So the inclusion of such powers, whenever possible, to solve common problems becomes a necessity for the EU. In addition, tensions between Algeria and Morocco have intensified and the confrontation between Saudi Arabia and Iran has solidified. It is possible to highlight the role of Turkey, Qatar and the Emirates, whilst Egypt and especially Syria have lost influence. The conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia, as well as Israel, will likely continue to dominate the MENA region, but the involvement of various players in the MENA makes the region more “fragmented” or subject to “competitive” multipolarity.⁸⁹ Moreover, it is important to stress that the conflict between Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the Emirates versus Qatar was critical in reshaping alliances in the region, especially as it brought Qatar closer to Turkey and created room for Iran to interact with Doha (and Istanbul) separately from Doha’s fellow Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members.

Shifting alliances and meddling by major powers and regional players make it more difficult for the EU to engage in longer-term crisis and conflict response. This is reflected in the EU approach to the MENA following the Arab uprisings. The EU is aware that addressing any problem in the region now requires coordination and dialogue with other relevant international/regional players. Despite the EU’s response to this multipolarity by upgrading its toolbox, diversifying its policies and moving to more pragmatism, its “track record remains limited to a few initiatives of uncertain consequence” and it continues to face challenges by the regional volatility and changes.⁹⁰ While the EU response to the changes in the MENA has been recognised in the literature, the dominance of the security-stability nexus seems to prevail.⁹¹ This situation has pushed some scholars to call for further critical EU reflection on its foreign and security policy towards the MENA by broadening the scope of engagement “to adequately factor in the new centrality of actors such

for International Studies, p. 93-107, <https://www.diis.dk/node/20799>; Karim Makdisi et al., “Regional Order from the Outside In: External Intervention, Regional Actors, Conflicts and Agenda in the MENA Region”, in *MENARA Methodology and Concept Papers*, No. 5 (November 2017), <https://www.iai.it/en/node/8546>.

⁸⁹ Raymond Hinnebusch, “The Middle East Regional System”, in Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami (eds), *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States*, 2nd ed., Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 2014, p. 35-72; Kristina Kausch, “Competitive Multipolarity in the Middle East”, in *The International Spectator*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (September 2015), p. 1-15.

⁹⁰ Rosa Balfour, “A Multipolar Southern Mediterranean: The EU in Search for a Role”, in IEMed, *The European Union in a Transformed Mediterranean: Strategies and Policies. Euromed Survey 5*, Barcelona, IEMed, 2014, p. 44-51 at p. 46-47, <https://www.iemed.org/?p=9271>.

⁹¹ Roberto Roccu and Benedetta Voltolini (eds), “Framing and Reframing the EU’s Engagement with the Mediterranean”, Special Issue in *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (2018).

as the Gulf states in the context of MENA geopolitics”. This requires an update of the way the EU frames the MENA region, the policies it focuses on, and the tools used.⁹²

3.3 Sub-Saharan Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa has traditionally been an important region for EU foreign and security policy and several countries have hosted CSDP operations and have been subject to other EU peacebuilding efforts. Increasing multipolar competition presents a challenge for the EU in this region too. Scholarship highlights that the increased presence of major powers in sub-Saharan Africa results in the EU losing its leverage with local governments and other local actors.⁹³ Scholars have furthermore noted the increased presence of state-sponsored actors (or “spoilers” in peacebuilding language), such as paramilitary groups, rebel or terrorist groups, that complicate and contest the EU’s efforts.⁹⁴

The security efforts of the US and the EU (and its member states) in sub-Saharan Africa remain largely complementary. The US has been implementing a security and counterterrorism agenda in the region since before the 11 September 2001 attacks. Scholars nonetheless point to some tensions between the stronger American focus on counterterrorism – in the aftermath of the 1998 bombings of the US embassy in Kenya and Tanzania and the 9/11 terrorist attacks – and the EU focus on development and peacebuilding, especially in the Horn of Africa and Sahel region.⁹⁵ The distinctive EU approach has, however, decreased in significance in recent years due to a disengagement from CSDP missions in sub-Saharan Africa,

⁹² Silvia Colombo and Eduard Soler i Lecha, “Europe and the ‘New’ Middle East”, cit., p. 416.

⁹³ See Part IV of Toni Hastrup, Luís Mah and Niall Duggan (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of EU-Africa Relations*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2021.

⁹⁴ Stephen John Stedman, “Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes”, cit.; Daniel Byman and Sarah E. Kreps, “Agents of Destruction? Applying Principal-Agent Analysis to State-Sponsored Terrorism”, in *International Studies Perspectives*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (February 2010), p. 1-18; Desirée Nilsson and Mimmi Söderberg Kovacs, “Revisiting an Elusive Concept: A Review of the Debate on Spoilers in Peace Processes”, in *International Studies Review*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (December 2011), p. 606-626.

⁹⁵ This was recently reiterated in two Council conclusions on both regions: Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on the European Union’s Integrated Strategy in the Sahel*, 7723/21, 16 April 2021, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7723-2021-INIT/en/pdf>; and *Council Conclusions on the Horn of Africa: A Geo-Strategic Priority for the EU*, 8135/21, 10 May 2021, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8135-2021-INIT/en/pdf>.

a stronger EU emphasis on the migration control, a reliance mostly on the United Nations and African regional organisations for security issues, and also a French approach more in line with the American counterterrorism efforts.⁹⁶

There is no shortage of literature analysing the increasing role of China in Africa, even though much of it focuses on economic cooperation.⁹⁷ Beijing's relations with African states are multifaceted. Economic cooperation and Chinese investment in Africa, including within the framework of the BRI, make African actors less dependent on Europe. But Chinese policies also have an effect on security. Chris Alden and Lu Jiang, for instance, note that the "proliferation of Chinese businesses and migrants across Africa is inspiring greater Chinese involvement in UN peacekeeping and private security initiatives".⁹⁸ Chinese and EU interests are not automatically conflicting. The stabilisation of conflicts can be beneficial to both, including by reducing the migration crisis.⁹⁹ At the same time, positions differ significantly over good governance, rule of law, human rights, and sustainable development and therefore the overall approach to conflict. The realisation that both the EU and China actively engage with Africa has also resulted in some literature detailing the modest attempts of trilateral dialogue between the three entities.¹⁰⁰

Russia's ties with sub-Saharan countries are subject to much less scholarly studies – even though President Putin has pushed for an intensification of Russia's presence

⁹⁶ For the Sahel, see Bruno Charbonneau, "Intervention in Mali: Building Peace Between Peacekeeping and Counterterrorism", in *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (2017), p. 415-431; John Karlsrud, "From Liberal Peacebuilding to Stabilization and Counterterrorism", in *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2019), p. 1-21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2018.1502040>.

⁹⁷ Chris Alden, *China in Africa*, London, Zed Books, 2007; Denis M. Tull, "China's Engagement in Africa: Scope, Significance and Consequences", in *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (September 2006), p. 459-479; Horace Campbell, "China in Africa: Challenging US Global Hegemony", in *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (2008), p. 89-105; Daniel Large, "Beyond 'Dragon in the Bush': The Study of China-Africa Relations", in *African Affairs*, Vol. 107, No. 426 (January 2008), p. 45-61, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adm069>.

⁹⁸ Chris Alden and Lu Jiang, "Brave New World: Debt, Industrialization and Security in China-Africa Relations", in *International Affairs*, Vol. 95, No. 3 (May 2019), p. 641-657 at p. 641.

⁹⁹ See Christine Hackenesch, "Not As Bad As It Seems: EU and US Democracy Promotion Faces China in Africa", in *Democratization*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (2015), p. 419-437, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2014.1002476>.

¹⁰⁰ Anna Katharina Stahl, *EU-China-Africa Trilateral Relations in a Multipolar World. Hic Sunt Dracones*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018; Bas Hooijmaaijers, "China's Rise in Africa and the Response of the EU: A Theoretical Analysis of the EU-China-Africa Trilateral Cooperation Policy Initiative", in *Journal of European Integration*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (2018), p. 443-460.

in the continent and even presided over the first Russia-Africa summit in Sochi in 2019.¹⁰¹ This “return” of Russia to Africa has sparked some interest in the think tank community, which has highlighted how sub-Saharan Africa is becoming another arena of competition between EU countries and Russia.¹⁰² A report of the European Parliament concludes that Russia’s “overall objective appears to be geopolitical competition with other more established players, rather than disinterested help for African partners. Its role is therefore viewed with concern by the EU institutions and Member States”.¹⁰³ This perspective has been further supported by the French-Russian tensions over paramilitary forces in Mali.¹⁰⁴ It is an example of state-sponsored non-state actors that now also affect and contest the implementation of the EU foreign and security policies in Africa. Others are less impressed, noting that Russia has limited appeal to African countries, given its limited resources.¹⁰⁵

The international approach to crises and conflicts in Africa has also involved the participation and contribution by African regional players and international institutions such as the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).¹⁰⁶ Yet it is not immediately clear that this leads to increased multipolar competition. Nigeria and South Africa are formidable players on the African continent and provide major contributions to peacekeeping debates in the UN and AU, but perhaps only Ethiopia provides competition with its conflicts

¹⁰¹ Russia-Africa Summit and Economic Forum, *Declaration of the First Russia–Africa Summit*, Sochi, 24 October 2019, <https://summitafrica.ru/en/about-summit/declaration>.

¹⁰² Paul Stronski, “Late to the Party: Russia’s Return to Africa”, in *Carnegie Papers*, October 2019, <https://carnegieendowment.org/publications/80056>; Aaliyah Vayez, “A Changing Dynamic: The Evolution of Russia-Africa Relations”, in *The Republic*, 14 September 2020, <https://wp.me/p8vu5k-245>; Vadim Balytnikov et al., “Russia’s Return to Africa: Strategy and Prospects”, in *Valdai Discussion Club Reports*, October 2019, <https://valdaiclub.com/files/27418>.

¹⁰³ Martin Russell and Eric Pichon, “Russia in Africa: A New Arena for Geopolitical Competition”, in *EPRS Briefings*, November 2019, p. 1, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI\(2019\)642283](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2019)642283).

¹⁰⁴ David Rich, “France and Russia Make a Stand Over Which Country Will Have the Greater Influence in Mali”, in *France 24*, 18 September 2021, <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20210918-in-mali-france-and-russia-are-facing-off-over-who-will-have-the-greater-influence-in-the-country>.

¹⁰⁵ Kimberly Marten, “Russia’s Back in Africa: Is the Cold War Returning?”, in *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (2019), p. 155-170; Emmanuel Dreyfus, “Moscow’s Limited Prospects in Sub-Saharan Africa”, in *Kennan Cables*, No. 47 (February 2020), <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/kennan-cable-no-47-moscows-limited-prospects-sub-saharan-africa>.

¹⁰⁶ Malte Brosig, *Cooperative Peacekeeping in Africa. Exploring Regime Complexity*, London/New York, Routledge, 2015.

to neighbouring countries and its strong peacekeeping troop contributions.

3.4 Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia differs from the regions discussed above in that the EU has not been as much of a major actor here. With the increased US-Chinese rivalry, however, the EU is now seeking to carve out a role for itself, including through the recent release of its long-awaited Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. The EU's engagement "with Asia" has resulted in considerable scholarship, even though the literature normally approaches Southeast Asia through a bipolar US–China lens.¹⁰⁷

The US has increasingly approached the region's challenges through "securitising" measures, primarily along unilateral or bilateral lines but lately also through high-level multilateral initiatives. Specifically, Washington has reinforced defence cooperation with strategic partners such as Japan, South Korea and Australia, increased "freedom of navigation" operations and overflight exercises in the South China Sea, adopted coercive economic diplomacy via tariffs, and stepped up criticisms of human rights violations by China in Hong Kong and Xinjiang.¹⁰⁸ In addition, it has struck the AUKUS security pact with the UK and Australia (which foresees the provision of US-made nuclear-powered submarines to the latter) and elevated the Quad dialogue with Australia, Japan and India to summit level. China, for its part, besides continuously pushing claims of sovereignty over disputed territories and maritime zones, has increased its incursions into Taiwan's air defence zone and built up its military with the goal to become the dominant country in the Western Pacific. In addition, it has upped its non-security and norm-setting engagement with countries in the region. Its foreign policy instruments include economic and investment initiatives such as the development-oriented

¹⁰⁷ Thomas Christiansen, Emil Kirchner and Philomena Murray (eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of EU-Asia Relations*, Basingstoke/New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013; Emil J. Kirchner, Thomas Christiansen and Han Dorussen (eds), *Security Relations Between China and the European Union. From Convergence to Cooperation?*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2016.

¹⁰⁸ Linde Desmaele and Luis Simón, "East Asia First, Europe Second: Picking Regions in US Grand Strategy", in *War on the Rocks*, 7 August 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/?p=20690>; Stephan Klose, "The Role of External Security Actors in East Asia: How the EU and the United States Shape Regional Security Relations", in *Studia Diplomatica*, Vol. 68, No. 4 (2017), p. 37-50, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26531666>.

Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank or the BRI.¹⁰⁹

In contrast to the US and China, the EU has traditionally adopted a “de-securitising” perspective grounded in multilateralism, regional cooperation and diplomacy.¹¹⁰ This policy jibes well with the focus of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). As the main regional organisation, ASEAN has been an important point of contact of the EU.¹¹¹ In fact, for most countries in this region cooperation with the EU is a means toward economic development and greater human security. Academic literature has privileged the concept of strategic hedging, noting that ASEAN countries try to put their eggs in as many baskets as possible, including by entertaining relations with the EU.¹¹² The EU has also sought to thematically compartmentalise its security and non-security relations with major regional players.¹¹³

Yet, it is important to stress that rules-based multilateralism efforts aimed at charting a “third way” in the Indo-Pacific have recently come up against the realities of strategic competition between the US and China (cf. Section 2.3). So, even though the recent EU Indo-Pacific strategy primarily deals with non-traditional security

¹⁰⁹ Yan Xuetong, “Becoming Strong: The New Chinese Foreign Policy”, in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 100, No. 4 (July/August 2021), p. 40-47.

¹¹⁰ Stephan Klose, “The Role of External Security Actors in East Asia”, cit.

¹¹¹ Ralf Emmers, “Unpacking ASEAN Neutrality: The Quest for Autonomy and Impartiality in Southeast Asia”, in *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (December 2018), p. 349-370, <https://bookshop.iseas.edu.sg/component/get/20414>; Mely Caballero-Anthony, “Understanding ASEAN’s Centrality: Bases and Prospects in an Evolving Regional Architecture”, in *Pacific Review*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (2014), p. 563-584.

¹¹² Evelyn Goh, “Great Powers and Hierarchical Order in Southeast Asia: Analyzing Regional Security Strategies”, in *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (2008), p. 113-157; Cheng-Chwee Kuik, “How Do Weaker States Hedge? Unpacking ASEAN States’ Alignment Behavior Towards China”, in *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 25, No. 100 (2016), p. 500-514; John D. Ciorciari and Jürgen Haacke, “Hedging in International Relations: An Introduction”, in *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (September 2019), p. 367-374, <https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lcz017>; Bilahari Kausikan, “The Arena”, in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 100, No. 2 (March/April 2021), p. 186-191; Michael Reiterer, “The EU’s Comprehensive Approach to Security in Asia”, in *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2014), p. 1-21.

¹¹³ The long-standing prioritization of trade has been partly driven by the distribution of competences within the EU. David Hallinan, “Approaching Credibility: The EU as a Political Actor and Strategic Partner in Northeast Asia”, in *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, Vol. 26 (2015), p. 187-205; François Godemont, “Wins and Losses in the EU-China Investment Agreement (CAI)”, in *Institut Montaigne Policy Papers*, January 2021, <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/node/8018>; Bruno Maçães, “Surprise! The EU Knows How to Handle China”, cit.; Steven Blockmans and Panos Koutrakos (eds), *Research Handbook on the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy*, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar, 2018.

issues, such as sustainable and inclusive growth, alongside the green transition and connectivity, the EU has adopted more incisive language regarding regional security.¹¹⁴ Chief among these threats to the EU's interest in maritime security is China's violations of international law in the South China Sea.¹¹⁵ These initiatives reflect the EU's objective of establishing structures aimed at conflict prevention, facilitating EU–Asia cooperation in conflict management.¹¹⁶

3.5 Latin America

Over the past few years, Latin America has become another arena where major powers fight for influence. Core values such as democracy, human rights, multilateralism and regionalism have always made up the basis for EU cooperation with Latin America.¹¹⁷ As recently as 2019 the Commission and the European External Action Service highlighted in a joint document the need to boost bi-regional cooperation under the pillars of democracy, resilience, prosperity and global governance.¹¹⁸ Indeed, the EU has been displaying a willingness to increase its action in the region.¹¹⁹

Whereas the EU distinguishes itself for relying on a sense of community and shared values, the US and China compete for influence, and regional players

¹¹⁴ Naila Maier-Knapp, “The Non-traditional Security Concept and the EU-ASEAN Relationship Against the Backdrop of China’s Rise”, in *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (2016), p. 411-430.

¹¹⁵ Eva Pejsova, “Increased Relevance for EU Policy and Actions in the South China Sea”, in *ISEAS Perspectives*, No. 2019/52 (26 June 2019), https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS_Perspective_2019_52.pdf.

¹¹⁶ Michael Reiterer, “The EU’s Comprehensive Approach to Security in Asia”, cit.

¹¹⁷ Tobias Jung Altrogge, “A New Cycle in Euro-Latin American Cooperation: Shared Values and Interests”, in *Documentos de Trabajo Fundación Carolina*, No. 47en (2021), <https://www.fundacioncarolina.es/?p=42662>; Daniel Pietikäinen, “EU-Latin America: Reviving the ‘Other’ Transatlantic Relationship”, in *#CriticalThinking*, 10 December 2020, <https://www.friendsofeurope.org/insights/eu-latin-america-reviving-the-other-transatlantic-relationship>.

¹¹⁸ Raffaele Piras, “Re-energising Transatlantic Relations: Towards a Different EU Approach to Latin America”, in *IAI Commentaries*, No. 20|57 (August 2020), <https://www.iai.it/en/node/11971>; European Commission and High Representative of the Union, *European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean: Joining Forces for a Common Future*, JOIN/2019/6, 16 April 2019, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52019JC0006>.

¹¹⁹ See Óscar Romero Vallenilla, “América Latina-Unión Europea: profundizar la relación”, in *Política Exterior*, 8 April 2021, <https://www.politicaexterior.com/?p=299109>; Macarena Vidal Liy and Amanda Mars, “EE UU vs China: escenarios de la nueva guerra fría”, in *El País*, 26 July 2020, <https://elpais.com/especiales/2020/ee-uu-vs-china-escenarios-de-la-nueva-guerra-fria>; Tobias Jung Altrogge, “A New Cycle in Euro-Latin American Cooperation”, cit.

such as Brazil try to carve out a space for themselves.¹²⁰ Some describe China's approach to Latin America as pragmatic, focusing on forging economic links by being involved in transports, industry and telecommunications.¹²¹ Others, however, depict China as a growing threat to stability, exemplified by Beijing's support for Nicolás Maduro's authoritarian regime in Venezuela.¹²² Moreover, the inclusion of several Latin American states in the BRI, alongside philanthropic and academic partnerships, highlights how China is extending its soft power, obtaining political benefits such as the shifting of recognition from Taiwan to China and support within international organisations.¹²³

In stark contrast, American influence in Latin America appears to be diminishing. President Biden might provide a corrective as someone who “brings a deeper knowledge of Latin America and the Caribbean to the presidency than any U.S. leader since the end of the Cold War”.¹²⁴ Accordingly, the president often appeals to multilateralism, underlining the need for international cooperation when tackling conflicts.¹²⁵ In addition, one cannot disregard the impact of the covid-19 pandemic which, besides exacerbating regional inequalities in Latin America, resulted in competitive vaccine diplomacy between China and the US. Meanwhile, Brazil has become a more active player with regard to conflict and crises, mostly through the UN context where it has made contributions to the conceptual debate on the Responsibility to Protect (“responsibility while protecting” in the Brazilian understanding of it) but also spearheaded work on the UN peacekeeping mission

¹²⁰ José Antonio Llorente and Claudio Vallejo, “América Latina ante la bipolaridad Estados Unidos-China. ¿Es la hora de Europa?”, in *Ideas LLYC*, 1 September 2021, <https://ideas.llorenteycuencia.com/?p=26430>.

¹²¹ Nicola Bilotta and Alissa Siara, “Could a Bridge between the EU and Latin America Boost Innovation ‘Sovereignty’ in a Multipolar World?”, in *IAI Papers*, No. 20|19 (July 2020), <https://www.iai.it/en/node/11930>.

¹²² Moises Rendon and Sarah Baumunk, “When Investment Hurts: Chinese Influence in Venezuela”, in *CSIS Commentaries*, 3 April 2018, <https://www.csis.org/node/45785>.

¹²³ Nicola Bilotta and Alissa Siara, “Could a Bridge between the EU and Latin America Boost Innovation ‘Sovereignty’ in a Multipolar World?”, cit.; Ciara Nugent and Charlie Campell, “The U.S. and China Are Battling for Influence in Latin America, and the Pandemic Has Raised the Stakes”, in *Time*, 4 February 2021, <https://time.com/5936037>.

¹²⁴ Ciara Nugent and Charlie Campell, “The U.S. and China Are Battling for Influence in Latin America...”, cit.

¹²⁵ Ryan Berg and Jorge González-Gallarza, “Europe’s Window of Opportunity on Venezuela Is Closing”, in *Americas Quarterly*, 14 April 2021, <https://www.americasquarterly.org/?p=24640>.

in Haiti.¹²⁶ Russia has historically been concerned with Cuba and Venezuela, as it continues to provide support for incumbent regimes in both countries.

Some scholars have argued that the EU could explore opportunities through regionalism and multilateralism.¹²⁷ It could strengthen its position as a coordinator of humanitarian crisis, especially in Venezuela and Colombia.¹²⁸ It could act as a mediator, promoting private-public agreements.¹²⁹ Former Uruguayan President José Mujica has called for a stronger European presence, so as to avoid dependence on China. Although geographical factors and EU member states' divergent preferences hamper the implementation of effective policies in Latin America, it is fundamental to tackle internal challenges and enhance collective action.

Conclusion

This literature review has examined how the existing scholarship has analysed the growing multipolar competition and its effects on the ability of the EU and its member states to formulate and implement common action on crises and conflicts. It has done so by discussing the concept of multipolarity before surveying the literature on the relations with the US, Russia and China in crises and conflicts, and finally zooming in on literature about several important regions.

The “international community” has traditionally disagreed on how to address conflicts and crises, with countries such as China, Russia and the US having different positions. Increasing multipolarity makes finding consensus on conflict management and crises response even more complicated. This makes it much more difficult for the EU to implement its integrated and normative approach, which relies heavily on multilateralism, engaging with partners, and a long-

¹²⁶ Markus-Michael Müller and Andrea Steinke, “The Geopolitics of Brazilian Peacekeeping and the United Nations’ Turn Towards Stabilisation in Haiti”, in *Peacebuilding*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (2020), p. 54-77.

¹²⁷ Raffaele Piras, “Re-energising Transatlantic Relations”, cit.

¹²⁸ Jorge Guzmán and Mónica Rico Benítez, “A New Role for the EU in Venezuela”, in *CEPS In Briefs*, 4 December 2020, <https://www.ceps.eu/?p=31515>; Detlef Nolte, “China Is Challenging but (Still) Not Displacing Europe in Latin America”, in *GIGA Focus Latin America*, No. 1 (February 2018), <https://www.giga-hamburg.de/en/publications/11567009-china-challenging-still-displacing-europe-latin-america>.

¹²⁹ Ibid.



term and sustained involvement in conflict management. Indeed, major powers increasingly diverge from the EU in their views of how to address crises and conflicts. The increasing presence of a multitude of major powers and regional players in different crises and conflicts also directly affects the EU's efforts on the ground. Scholarship notes that EU political leverage with local governments and other local actors have eroded even if there also appear some openings in such regions as Latin America. Furthermore, changing coalitions of actors create uncertainty. State-sponsored actors, which contest and undermine EU efforts, add to the Union's difficulties.

Major powers are not equally active everywhere. In some areas, regional players (from Saudi Arabia to Brazil) wield considerable influence. Also, major powers play very roles in crises and conflicts. The approach by China is much more comprehensive, involving military, political and economic elements (even if economic tools dominate), than the Russian approach. It does not appear that all the emerging powers play similar roles in crises and conflicts on a global scale. Indeed, this literature review has not discussed the role of, for instance, India, simply because the academic literature hardly considers India of relevance for EU foreign and security policy in conflict management and crisis response. Similarly, the contributions from countries such as Brazil and South Africa are often considered in the literature as more constructive than competitive, and rarely fundamentally constraining EU efforts at peace and security. Such variations also raise the question whether there may be opportunities for the EU and whether the EU should reconsider its partnerships.

It is possible to highlight several implications of growing multipolar competition for the study of EU foreign and security policy in the realm of conflicts and crises. First, the EU and its member states need to reckon with the eroding consensus in the “international community” and the divergent approaches to crisis management and conflict response. Scholarship has pointed out that EU security policies in conflict regions are almost always interlinked and dependent on those of partner institutions.¹³⁰ If the formal international institutions of multilateralism, such as the

¹³⁰ Petar Petrov et al., “All Hands on Deck: Levels of Dependence Between the EU and Other International Organizations in Peacebuilding”, in *Journal of European Integration*, Vol. 41, No. 8 (2019), p. 1027-1043, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2019.1622542>.


UN, fail to deliver, the EU's abilities to make a difference is constrained. The EU will therefore likely have to engage through other partner constellations. Research should focus on the efficacy of ad hoc coalitions, mini-laterals and engagement with like-minded actors for EU foreign and security policy.¹³¹ Similarly, it should focus on the ability of the EU to compartmentalise security issues and deal directly with China, Russia and the US on specific issues (such as in the case of Iran nuclear proliferation).

Second, this literature review has highlighted considerable variation across major powers, regional powers, and indeed conflict regions. While this adds to the complexity of crisis response and crisis management in general, it also still allows for EU foreign and security policy to play its part. For instance, High Representative Federica Mogherini has noted that “[w]e have always put our convening power at the service of multilateralism, trying to bring the relevant regional and global powers to the negotiating table”.¹³² But does this work? Perhaps not in zero-sum conflicts, such as with Russia over Ukraine, where EU convening power is limited. Yet the literature review has highlighted instances where multipolarity may be mitigated and where the EU can work with a varying constellation of actors. Therefore, multipolarity can be viewed as a window of opportunity for collaboration with international regional players to solve problems of common interest. In this respect, further research should focus on the relations with a number of increasing regional powers and how the EU is/can cooperate with them.

Finally, this literature review has highlighted that multipolar competition can also affect the local situation in which EU foreign and security policy instruments are being implemented. Increased investment, for instance with the BRI, may make countries less dependent on European funding and therefore indirectly reduce EU leverage with local governments. Further research is needed, in this respect, on how this affects the EU's ability to implement its integrated approach. Differently, but also affecting local conflict dynamics, recent policy publications

¹³¹ See also the recent joint communication on multilateralism: European Commission and High Representative of the Union, *Strengthening the EU's Contribution to Rules-based Multilateralism*, JOIN/2021/3, 17 February 2021, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021JC0003>.

¹³² European External Action Service (EEAS), *The European Union's Global Strategy. Three Years On, Looking Forward*, June 2019, p. 5, <https://europa.eu/IQf88CQ>.



point at multipolar competition resulting in some instances of state-sponsored contestations of EU crisis management and conflict response activities. How the EU can deal with such “sharp power”, “sabotage”, and “spoilers” to peace and security within conflict regions requires further study as well.

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Riccardo Alcaro (ed.), *The Liberal Order and its Contestations. Great Powers and Regions Transiting in a Multipolar Era*, London/New York, Routledge, 2018

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Jeffrey Anderson, G. John Ikenberry and Thomas Risse (eds), *The End of the West? Crisis and Change in the Atlantic Order*, Ithaca/London, Cornell University Press, 2008

Ruben Andersson and Florian Weigand, “Intervention at Risk: The Vicious Cycle of Distance and Danger in Mali and Afghanistan”, in *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (2015), p. 519–541, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2015.1054655>

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Derek Averre, “The Ukraine Conflict: Russia’s Challenge to European Security Governance”, in *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 68, No. 4 (2016), p. 699-725

Rosa Balfour, “A Multipolar Southern Mediterranean: The EU in Search for a Role”, in IEMed, *The European Union in a Transformed Mediterranean: Strategies and Policies. Euromed Survey 5*, Barcelona, IEMed, 2014, p. 44-51, <https://www.iemed.org/?p=9271>

Vadim Balytnikov et al., “Russia’s Return to Africa: Strategy and Prospects”, in *Valdai Discussion Club Reports*, October 2019, <https://valdaiclub.com/files/27418>

Michelle Bentley and Maxine David, “Unpredictability As Doctrine: Reconceptualising Foreign Policy Strategy in the Trump Era”, in *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (2021), p. 383-406

Ryan Berg and Jorge González-Gallarza, “Europe’s Window of Opportunity on Venezuela Is Closing”, in *Americas Quarterly*, 14 April 2021, <https://www.americasquarterly.org/?p=24640>

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