



China, the war in ukraine, the Middle East and the Venezuelan direction of the United States of America as signs of the transition to a conflict-ridden world order and threats to sustainable development, food security, and natural resources

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21157903>

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Abstract

The article analyzes the transformation of the contemporary world order through the prism of four interrelated crisis vectors: China's structural rise as an alternative center of economic, technological and infrastructural power; the war in Ukraine as a direct challenge to international law, European security and global food chains; the Middle East as a humanitarian, energy and ecological frontier of modern geopolitics; and the Venezuelan direction of the United States of America as a manifestation of the renewed struggle for political transition, energy resources and influence in the Western Hemisphere. The aim of the study is to determine how these processes indicate the transition toward a conflict-ridden world order and how they generate threats to sustainable development, food security and natural resources. Methodologically, the research is based on qualitative documentary analysis, hermeneutic interpretation of political texts, international reports and scientific literature, as well as comparative assessment of four crisis cases. The proposed analytical approach combines geopolitical criteria with sustainability-oriented criteria, including military intensity, humanitarian gravity, pressure on sustainable development, food security impact, natural resource pressure and global polarization. The results show that the current crisis of world order cannot be reduced only to the weakening of

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international law or the redistribution of power among great actors. It also involves the destabilization of agrifood systems, maritime routes, energy markets, water access, land resources, mineral extraction, reconstruction capacity and environmental resilience. The article argues that the world is entering a phase of conflict polycentricity, in which several centers of power simultaneously compete for influence while conflicts increasingly undermine the material foundations of sustainable development.

Keywords: world order, China, war in Ukraine, Middle East, Venezuela, sustainable development, food security, natural resources, conflict polycentricity, energy security, international law.

China, la guerra en Ucrania, Oriente Medio y la dirección venezolana de los Estados Unidos de América como señales de la transición hacia un orden mundial plagado de conflictos y amenazas para el desarrollo sostenible, la seguridad alimentaria y los recursos naturales

Resumen

El artículo analiza la transformación del orden mundial contemporáneo a través de cuatro vectores de crisis interrelacionados: el ascenso estructural de China como centro alternativo de poder económico, tecnológico e infraestructural; la guerra en Ucrania como desafío directo al derecho internacional, a la seguridad europea y a las cadenas alimentarias globales; Oriente Medio como frontera humanitaria, energética y ecológica de la geopolítica moderna; y la dirección venezolana de los Estados Unidos de América como manifestación de una renovada lucha por la transición política, los recursos energéticos y la influencia en el hemisferio occidental. El objetivo del estudio es determinar cómo estos procesos indican la transición hacia un orden mundial plagado de conflictos y cómo generan amenazas para el desarrollo sostenible, la seguridad alimentaria y los recursos naturales. Metodológicamente, la investigación se basa en el análisis documental cualitativo, la interpretación hermenéutica de textos políticos, informes internacionales y literatura científica, así como en una evaluación comparativa de cuatro casos de crisis. El enfoque analítico propuesto combina criterios geopolíticos con criterios orientados a la sostenibilidad, incluida la intensidad militar, la gravedad humanitaria, la presión sobre el desarrollo sostenible, el impacto en la seguridad alimentaria, la presión sobre los recursos

naturales y la polarización global. Los resultados muestran que la crisis actual del orden mundial no puede reducirse únicamente al debilitamiento del derecho internacional o a la redistribución del poder entre los grandes actores. También implica la desestabilización de los sistemas agroalimentarios, las rutas marítimas, los mercados energéticos, el acceso al agua, los recursos de la tierra, la extracción mineral, la capacidad de reconstrucción y la resiliencia ambiental. El artículo sostiene que el mundo está entrando en una fase de policentrismo conflictivo, en la que varios centros de poder compiten simultáneamente por influencia mientras los conflictos socavan cada vez más las bases materiales del desarrollo sostenible.

Palabras clave: orden mundial, China, guerra en Ucrania, Oriente Medio, Venezuela, desarrollo sostenible, seguridad alimentaria, recursos naturales, policentrismo conflictivo, seguridad energética, derecho internacional.

Introduction

The beginning of the 21st century bears less and less resemblance to the era that was described at the turn of the 1990s and 2000s as the triumph of the liberal international order. After the end of the Cold War, global politics seemed to be moving in the direction of the gradual expansion of international law, open trade, democratic legitimacy, multilateral governance, sustainable development, resource cooperation and the gradual stabilization of global food systems. However, history has turned out to be less straightforward.

The rise of China, the return of large-scale wars in Europe and the Middle East, a new wave of militarization, the weakening of universal norms, and external intervention in the political processes of strategic regions indicate not the end of history but the return of history in its most acute form. At the same time, these processes demonstrate that the crisis of world order is no longer limited to diplomacy, military alliances or the balance of power. It increasingly affects the material foundations of human security, including access to food,

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water, energy, agricultural land, transport corridors, critical infrastructure and natural resources.

The peculiarity of the current moment is that the crisis of the world order does not have a single center. It consists of several interconnected directions. China challenges not only the economic dominance of the West, but also the very philosophy of liberal universalism, while simultaneously shaping new infrastructural, technological and resource dependencies through trade routes, ports, energy projects, mineral supply chains and investment in the Global South.

The war in Ukraine has raised the question of whether international law can actually restrain imperial violence if the aggressor has significant military, nuclear and resource potential. It has also shown that modern war can become a direct threat to sustainable development, because the destruction of energy facilities, ports, agricultural infrastructure, housing, water systems and transport networks affects not only one country, but also global food markets and long-term reconstruction capacity.

The Middle East demonstrates the limit of humanitarian rhetoric, when the civilian population finds itself between military necessity, religious-political identities, energy interests, water scarcity, disrupted food access and the weakness of international coercive mechanisms. Venezuela, in turn, returns to the political debate the question of whether the external presence of a great power can be justified by the need for political transition, stabilization of the energy market, access to oil and mineral resources or the fight against authoritarian rule. In this case, we are talking not only about Latin America. It is about the broader question of whether the post-hegemonic world is able to maintain the line between supporting change and imposing change, as well as

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between protecting international stability and redistributing control over strategic natural resources. In our view, these processes should not be viewed as separate regional crises. They are components of a single historical fracture within which the world is moving from an order based on the dominance of a single center of power to a conflictual polycentricity. Such polycentricity does not mean automatic equilibrium. On the contrary, it creates a situation in which each major actor claims its own interpretation of security, justice, development, legitimacy and control over the resources necessary for survival and growth.

In this sense, modern geopolitics is once again acquiring a philosophical content. It is not just about territories, resources, armies, or sanctions. It is about the dispute over what the world should be like, who has the right to set the rules, whether there is a universal morality in international politics, and whether humanitarian rhetoric can remain convincing when the great powers themselves violate the principles they proclaim. However, in the conditions of the new conflict-ridden world order, this dispute also concerns food security, energy security, water security, environmental resilience, the protection of agricultural production and the governance of natural resources.

The purpose of the study is to provide a historical, geopolitical, philosophical and sustainability-oriented understanding of the transformation of the world order through the analysis of four crisis vectors related to China, the war in Ukraine, the Middle East, and Venezuela. The article aims to show that these vectors are not only signs of geopolitical fragmentation, but also sources of threats to sustainable development, food security and natural resources.

Achieving this goal requires not only describing the facts, but also reconstructing the meanings that political actors, international organizations,

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scholars, and the media give to these facts, as well as identifying how these crises affect agrifood systems, energy markets, maritime logistics, water access, land resources, environmental security and the long-term ability of societies to recover after shocks.

The first research question concerns China. Is China's current rise merely the economic rise of a new great power, or does it signify the emergence of an alternative philosophy of world order based on sovereignty, infrastructural dependence, state capitalism, political pluralism without liberal universality, resource diplomacy and the strategic control of supply chains?

The second research question concerns wars. Can the war in Ukraine and the war in the Middle East be seen as two different but interconnected tests of the ability of international law to protect civilians, territorial integrity, humanitarian standards, food systems, energy infrastructure, water access and the ecological foundations of sustainable development?

The third research question concerns the United States of America and Venezuela. Is the increased American presence in Venezuela a manifestation of stabilization policy, or does it indicate a return to the practice of forcibly shaping political transitions in strategically important regions, where political influence is inseparable from oil, gas, mineral resources and control over regional security?

The fourth research question concerns the general trajectory of the world order. Do China, the war in Ukraine, the Middle East and the Venezuelan direction of the United States of America collectively indicate the transition toward a conflict-ridden world order in which geopolitical rivalry increasingly threatens sustainable development, food security and natural resources?

1. Theoretical and conceptual foundations

The current scholarly debate on world order is evolving between several major approaches. The first approach assumes that the liberal order, despite the crisis, retains normative appeal, as it links security, economic openness, human rights, and international organizations. Ikenberry (2020) thinks along these lines, viewing liberal internationalism as a long historical tradition that is experiencing a crisis but not entirely losing its capacity for renewal. From this perspective, the weakening of the liberal order is dangerous not only because it reduces the authority of international law, but also because it undermines the ability of states to coordinate responses to climate risks, food shortages, energy instability, water scarcity and ecological degradation.

The second approach, represented by the realist tradition, emphasizes that the liberal order was a historically brief exception, dependent on the preeminence of the United States of America after the Cold War. Mearsheimer (2019) argues that the liberal international order had internal limitations, as it attempted to disseminate universal political principles in a world where states remain driven by national interests, security fears, and the balance of power. For this article, realism is important because it explains why food, energy, minerals, ports, maritime routes, agricultural land and water resources increasingly become not neutral economic categories, but instruments of power, coercion and strategic dependence.

Between these two approaches lies the concept of a multiplex world, developed by Acharya (2017). In this vision, world order is no longer reduced to a single center, a single development model, or a single source of legitimacy. On the contrary, it is shaped by the coexistence of several regional orders, several

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civilizational notions, and several modernization models. Such an approach is particularly relevant for the analysis of sustainable development, because different centers of power promote different understandings of development, resource governance, food security, infrastructure financing and environmental responsibility.

It is within this theoretical framework that China should be considered. Its rise cannot be explained solely by gross domestic product, exports, or military spending. China offers an alternative vocabulary of international politics. Its central concepts are sovereignty, development, infrastructure, noninterference, stability, and mutual benefit. At the same time, critics of this approach point out that the language of development may conceal new asymmetries of dependence, debt pressures, environmental risks, and Beijing's growing political influence in the countries of the Global South.

The war in Ukraine takes the discussion of world order from the theoretical plane to the space of direct historical testing. If territorial integrity and the prohibition of aggressive war are the basic principles of post-war international law, then the inability to quickly stop aggression means a deep crisis not only of security policy, but also of the very idea of a legal order between states. At the same time, the war in Ukraine demonstrates that aggression against a sovereign state can generate systemic threats to sustainable development, including destruction of energy infrastructure, damage to agricultural production, disruption of Black Sea logistics, contamination of land resources, pressure on reconstruction capacity and destabilization of global food markets.

The Middle East adds another level to this crisis. It is a situation in which a humanitarian catastrophe, religious history, colonial heritage, regional ambitions,

energy security and global diplomacy merge into one complex knot. Here international law does not disappear completely, but appears more as a language of accusations than as an effective mechanism for protecting civilians (Table 1).

Table 1. Theoretical approaches to the interpretation of the contemporary world order

Approach	Basic idea	Explanatory value for this article
Liberal internationalism	World order can be stabilized through law, institutions, open markets, human rights and international cooperation for sustainable development	Helps explain why contemporary wars and external interventions are perceived as a crisis of the normative order and as a threat to coordinated responses to food insecurity, environmental degradation and resource scarcity
Realism	States act in the direction of security and power, while law has significance only when it is supported by force	Explains the return of militarization, spheres of influence and competition between great powers, including competition for energy, food systems, maritime routes, minerals and strategic infrastructure
Multiplex world	The international system consists of several centers, regional orders and models of legitimacy	Allows China, the Middle East, Ukraine and Venezuela to be read as parts of a single transition toward polycentricity, where different actors propose different models of development, resource governance and food security
Critical geopolitics	Geopolitical facts are always interpreted through language, maps, narratives and historical memory	Makes it possible to analyze not only events, but also the meanings created around them, including narratives about development, humanitarian responsibility, energy security, food access and natural resources

Venezuela is important because it brings back the question of the Western Hemisphere. In the 20th century, Latin America was often a space of external influence, experiments with political regimes, sanctions pressure and the struggle for energy resources. In the 21st century. This trajectory has not disappeared, but

has only acquired a new meaning, in which democratic rhetoric is intertwined with energy, migration, security, drug policy, and regional balance.

2. Methodology

Methodologically, the article is based on qualitative documentary research, hermeneutic analysis and comparative geopolitical assessment. The hermeneutic approach is used because modern international crises exist not only as facts, but also as texts. They are presented in the speeches of leaders, resolutions, international reports, analytical documents, media images and scientific concepts. Therefore, the task of the researcher is not only to collect data, but also to understand what meanings various political actors give to these data. In the context of this article, special attention is also paid to the way in which political actors interpret access to food, energy, water, agricultural land, minerals, maritime routes and critical infrastructure as elements of security, influence and development.

The documentary corpus of the study includes three groups of sources. The first group includes scientific works on the theory of international order, realism, liberal internationalism, multipolarity and the rise of China. The second group includes reports of international organizations, in particular the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the World Bank, UNICEF, OCHA, UNCTAD and SIPRI. The third group includes analytical materials from leading research centers on Venezuela, the American presence in the region, and the Western Hemisphere crisis. China's infrastructural influence, the Middle East, energy routes and strategic resource competition. The fourth group includes international media reports and official statements that make it possible to clarify

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the chronology of recent events and verify how crises are publicly framed in connection with sustainable development, food security and natural resources.

The research procedure involved three stages. The first stage involved contextual reading of the sources, during which the main facts, actors, and historical circumstances of each case were identified. The second stage involved philosophical reading aimed at identifying basic concepts such as sovereignty, legitimacy, power, order, justice, and humanitarian responsibility. The third stage involved a comparative assessment of the four crisis areas using five criteria (Table 2).

Table 2. Documentary corpus and analytical purpose of source groups

Source group	Type of materials	Analytical purpose
Scholarly sources	Monographs and articles on the theory of international relations, world order, realism, liberalism and multipolarity.	Formation of the theoretical foundation, definition of concepts and reconstruction of the academic debate.
International reports	UNHCR, OHCHR, OCHA, UNICEF, World Bank, SIPRI, UNCTAD and other organizations.	Factual basis regarding casualties, displacement, military expenditure, humanitarian needs and economic losses, food insecurity, environmental degradation, energy instability and natural-resource risks
Analytical centers	Council on Foreign Relations, Brookings Institution, AidData and other specialized institutions.	Interpretation of the policies of great powers, crisis dynamics and regional consequences.
Media sources	Reports by international agencies on recent developments and official statements.	Clarification of the chronology of events and verification of current political context.

The methodological limitation of the study is that it does not claim to be a definitive quantitative model of world politics. The proposed index is an analytical tool that helps to systematize comparisons, but does not replace a full-fledged econometric study. At the same time, it allows us to show which components form the tension in various regional crises and how these components are connected with threats to sustainable development, food security and natural resources. Thus, the index should be understood as an interpretive comparative instrument that combines geopolitical analysis with the assessment of conflict-induced sustainability risks.

3. China and its new position in the world order

China's presence in the modern world is dual in nature. On the one hand, China is deeply integrated into the global economy, dependent on trade, technology, raw materials, sea routes and external markets. On the other hand, it is this integration that Beijing is using to gradually shape an alternative geoeconomic architecture. China is not openly destroying globalization. It is trying to change its center of gravity.

According to the World Bank, China's growth in 2025 was estimated at 4.9%, in 2026 it was predicted to slow down to 4.4%, and in 2027 to 4.2%. Such a slowdown does not mean a loss of global importance. On the contrary, it shows a transition from a phase of rapid industrial expansion to a phase of structural competition, in which China retains its importance not only as a producer, but also as a lender, investor, technological actor and diplomatic mediator (World Bank, 2026).

Of particular importance is the role of Chinese development finance. AidData estimates that between 2000 and 2021, China supported 20,985 projects

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in 165 low- and middle-income countries, worth US\$1.34 trillion. This means that Chinese geopolitics is not limited to military power. It operates through ports, railways, power plants, roads, logistics hubs, telecommunications and industrial zones (AidData, 2023). These projects are also directly related to the material foundations of sustainable development, because they influence transport accessibility, energy production, agricultural exports, urbanization, extraction of natural resources and the integration of developing countries into global trade. At the same time, infrastructure can become not only a development instrument, but also a mechanism of long-term dependence if financial obligations, environmental risks and political influence are not balanced by transparency and institutional accountability.

The Chinese model is attractive to some countries in the Global South because it does not impose the same political conditions as Western creditors or donors. At the same time, this very feature creates a philosophical problem. If development is separated from human rights, political accountability and transparency, then it can turn into a technocratic form of dependency. The state receives infrastructure, but at the same time it is caught in a complex web of financial, technological and diplomatic obligations. In such conditions, sustainable development may become formally accelerated but substantively vulnerable, especially when large infrastructure projects increase debt exposure, put pressure on ecosystems, reshape land use or strengthen external control over strategic resources.

China does not necessarily seek to create a complete replica of American hegemony. Its strategy is more subtle. It is to create a world in which Western rules are no longer the sole language of international legitimacy. In such a world, one can talk about human rights, but one can also talk about non-interference.

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One can talk about democracy, but one can also talk about stability. One can talk about open markets, but one can also talk about state planning and infrastructure development.

That is why China is emerging not only as a geopolitical competitor but as a philosophical challenge. It is forcing the West to answer the question of whether the liberal order was truly universal or whether it merely reflected the historical superiority of Western states after the Cold War. The answer to this question cannot be purely economic. It concerns the very way of thinking about order, progress, and political modernization. It also concerns the question of who has the authority to define development priorities, environmental responsibility, resource sovereignty and the relationship between economic growth and human security.

The Chinese direction also demonstrates an important shift in the nature of power. In classical geopolitics, power was understood mainly as territorial control, military presence, and the ability to coerce. In today's external environment, power is often expressed through dependence on logistical routes, technological standards, credit instruments, and access to markets. Thus, infrastructure ceases to be a mere material object and becomes a language of political influence. In the new conflict-ridden world order, this language increasingly includes access to ports, fertilizers, rare earth elements, oil and gas routes, grain logistics, digital infrastructure and industrial technologies. Therefore, China's rise should be interpreted as a transformation of power from direct control over territory to indirect control over the systems that sustain production, trade, food security and resource circulation (Table 3).

Table 3. China as a structural actor of the new world order

Component of influence	Concrete manifestation	Geopolitical significance
Economy	The second-largest economy in the world and a key production center.	Shifts the center of global production toward Asia and strengthens dependence on Chinese supply chains.
Infrastructure	Loans, ports, railways, energy facilities, logistics corridors and telecommunications networks.	Creates long-term channels of influence through material dependence.
Diplomacy	Activity in the Global South, mediation initiatives and participation in multilateral formats.	Weakens the monopoly of the West on defining rules and diplomatic priorities.
Military power	Growing military expenditure, naval development and army modernization.	Increases pressure in the Indo-Pacific region and around Taiwan.
Ideology	Emphasis on sovereignty, stability and development without liberal democratization.	Offers an alternative to the universalist political model of the West.
Natural resources and food systems	Access to critical minerals, energy projects, agricultural cooperation, port infrastructure and logistics hubs	Transforms resource governance and food security into instruments of strategic influence in the Global South and beyond

At the same time, China’s rise is not a continuous line of success. Demographic aging, local government debt, real estate market problems, technological constraints, sanctions pressure, and tensions in the Indo-Pacific region pose a number of internal and external challenges for Beijing. That is why China cannot be described as a future undisputed hegemon. It is more appropriate to speak of it as a structural competitor, capable of changing the rules even without full control over the system. Its influence lies precisely in the fact that it can reshape the conditions under which other countries build infrastructure, secure food supplies, access energy, extract resources, participate in trade and define their own development strategies. Therefore, China’s new

position in the world order is not only a question of power redistribution, but also a question of who will shape the material foundations of sustainable development in the coming decades.

4. The war in Ukraine as a crisis of international law

The war in Ukraine is one of the most important historical tests of the international order since 1945. Its significance goes far beyond regional security. It is about whether the prohibition of aggressive war has real force if it is violated by a state with a large military potential, a permanent seat on the UN Security Council and significant resources. At the same time, this war is also a test of the ability of the international system to protect the material foundations of sustainable development, including energy infrastructure, agricultural production, food exports, transport corridors, land resources, housing, water systems and long-term reconstruction capacity.

The humanitarian consequences of the war indicate the systemic nature of the destruction. According to UNHCR, as of September 2025, 5.75 million refugees from Ukraine were registered in the world, including 5.2 million in Europe, and 3.75 million people remained internally displaced (UNHCR, 2026). These figures reflect not only the scale of population displacement, but also the long-term disruption of social ties, educational trajectories, the labor market and demographic structure. They also show that war undermines sustainable development not only through direct physical destruction, but also through the loss of human capital, demographic imbalance, pressure on host societies and the weakening of local communities that are necessary for post-war recovery.

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The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reported that at least 238 civilians were killed and 1,404 civilians injured in April 2026, the highest monthly civilian casualties since July 2025. The report also recorded an 18% increase compared to April 2025 and a 13% increase compared to March 2026 (OHCHR, 2026). Civilian casualties in this context are not only a humanitarian tragedy. They also indicate the destruction of the social basis of development, because every attack on residential areas, medical facilities, educational institutions, energy systems or transport infrastructure reduces the ability of society to maintain normal economic and social life.

The economic component is no less important. According to the World Bank, the Government of Ukraine, the European Commission and the UN, as of 31 December 2025, the total cost of recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine was estimated at almost US\$588 billion for the next decade, while direct losses exceeded US\$195 billion. Housing, transport and energy were particularly affected (World Bank, 2026). These figures reveal the war as a crisis of sustainable development, because reconstruction is not limited to the restoration of buildings or roads. It requires the rebuilding of energy systems, logistics corridors, agricultural capacities, water supply, environmental safety, industrial production and institutional trust. Therefore, the economic losses caused by the war should be interpreted not only as financial damage, but also as a long-term weakening of the development trajectory of the state.

A separate dimension of the war is its impact on food security and natural resources. Ukraine has traditionally played an important role in global grain and agricultural markets, while the destruction of port infrastructure, attacks on energy facilities, mining of territories, contamination of land, disruption of agricultural production and pressure on Black Sea logistics create risks that go

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far beyond national borders. In this sense, the war shows that food security is not only an agricultural issue, but also a geopolitical issue. Access to ports, railways, storage facilities, fuel, electricity and safe agricultural land becomes a condition for the stability of both domestic and global food systems.

The philosophical significance of this war lies in the fact that it destroys the illusion of automatic progress. After World War II, international law developed as a response to the experience of catastrophe. It was not only supposed to regulate the behavior of states, but also to prevent a return to the imperial trajectory. However, the aggression against Ukraine showed that law without force is not always able to stop force.

At the same time, the war revealed the opposite process. It demonstrated that even in conditions of large-scale violence, international law does not disappear. It remains the language of diplomacy, sanctions, investigations, compensation, international solidarity and future responsibility. Therefore, this is not so much the death of international law as a crisis of its coercive capacity.

The militarization of Europe is also gaining special significance. SIPRI recorded that in 2025, global military spending reached 2,887 billion US dollars, and spending in Europe increased by 14%. The war in Ukraine has become one of the key factors in this process. Europe is thus returning to a historical state in which security once again requires not only norms but also defensive capabilities (SIPRI, 2026).

In humanitarian terms, this war also demonstrates that the concepts of victory, peace and reconstruction have different horizons. Military victory may mean the liberation of territories, but social reconstruction requires the return of people, the reconstruction of cities, overcoming trauma, restoring trust in state

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authorities and creating conditions for economic life. Political peace can be concluded faster than human security is restored. This is why the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine will be not only a technical project, but also a long-term moral task (Table 4).

Table 4. The war in Ukraine as a test of the international order

Sphere of impact	Factual manifestation	Significance for world order
International law	Violation of territorial integrity and the principle of non-use of force.	Undermines the foundations of the post-war security system.
Humanitarian sphere	Civilian casualties, population displacement and destruction of housing.	Reveals the crisis of mechanisms designed to protect civilian populations.
Economy	Recovery needs estimated at almost 588 billion US dollars over a decade.	Transforms war into a long-term financial and institutional challenge.
European security	Growth of defense expenditure, rearmament and reassessment of threats.	Returns militarization to the center of European politics.
Food security	Strikes against port, energy and agricultural infrastructure.	Exposes the vulnerability of grain markets and global logistics.

The war also changed the European concept of strategic autonomy. Until 2022, it was often perceived as a debate about the balance between the United States of America and the European Union. After a full-scale invasion, the issue became much more concrete. It concerns ammunition stocks, production capacity, air defense, energy sustainability, cybersecurity, and the ability to withstand a protracted war of attrition.

5. The Middle East as a humanitarian frontier of modern geopolitics

The Middle East is a space where history, religion, colonial heritage, national projects, energy and geopolitics cannot be separated. The war in this region is not just a military clash. It is a crisis of meaning, in which each side appeals to historical memory, the right to security, collective trauma and political survival. At the same time, the Middle East is also a space where the crisis of world order directly intersects with sustainable development, food security, water access, energy routes and the governance of natural resources. Therefore, the region should be interpreted not only as a geopolitical frontier, but also as one of the most vulnerable zones of the global sustainability crisis.

Gaza has become one of the most dramatic symbols of this crisis. OCHA noted in June 2026 that the humanitarian situation in Gaza remains fragile and dangerous, with strikes continuing daily, most people remaining displaced, access to safe water limited and the accumulation of solid waste in residential areas increasing the risks of disease, especially among children (OCHA, 2026). This description shows that the humanitarian crisis is inseparable from the ecological crisis, because destroyed infrastructure, limited sanitation, solid waste accumulation, damaged water systems and restricted humanitarian access create a chain of risks for public health, environmental safety and long-term urban recovery.

UNICEF reported that for 1.1 million children in Gaza, water remains a daily uncertainty, 82% of households are water-unsafe and up to 70% are unable to collect the minimum 6 liters. per person per day for drinking and cooking (UNICEF, 2026). Such figures turn a humanitarian crisis into a crisis of the political vocabulary itself, because without water, food, medicine and security,

the concept of law becomes too abstract. In this context, water is not only a humanitarian need, but also a strategic resource and a central category of sustainable development. When access to safe water becomes uncertain, the crisis affects nutrition, hygiene, disease prevention, child protection, food preparation and the very possibility of maintaining social life.

The peculiarity of the Middle East crisis is that it undermines the very possibility of neutral language. Every concept, including security, occupation, terrorism, self-defense, genocide, humanitarian access and the right to statehood, becomes the subject of struggle. Therefore, geopolitical analysis here inevitably turns philosophical. The question is not only who controls the territory, but also whether human life retains political value in a situation where collective fears become stronger than universal norms.

The Middle East also has global effects. Even local escalation can affect transport routes, energy prices, food security, migration flows and the domestic politics of states beyond the region. That is why this war cannot be described as merely regional. It is one of the nerve centers of the world order. The vulnerability of the Red Sea, the Suez Canal, the Strait of Hormuz and other strategic routes demonstrates that conflicts in the region may influence shipping costs, insurance prices, oil and gas transportation, fertilizer markets, food imports and the stability of global supply chains. Thus, the Middle East connects local suffering with the global economy, because insecurity in this region can quickly transform into energy instability, food-price pressure and disruption of maritime logistics.

Unlike the war in Ukraine, where the central issue is aggression against a sovereign state, the Middle East demonstrates a different type of crisis, namely

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the crisis of a protracted unresolved conflict, in which statehood, security, and humanitarian rights have been mutually blocked for decades. It is this duration that makes the region particularly explosive.

The philosophical core of the Middle East crisis lies in the conflict between the right to security and the right to political existence. If one side thinks of itself through the experience of surviving a historical catastrophe, and the other side thinks of itself through the experience of prolonged deprivation of statehood, then a political compromise requires not only diplomacy but also a rethinking of memory. Without this, any truce remains a technical pause, not a basis for peace (Table 5).

Table 5. The Middle East as a node of humanitarian and geopolitical crisis

Component	Manifestation	Consequence
Humanitarian crisis	Population displacement, water shortages, disease risks and destruction of infrastructure.	Deepens distrust toward the international system for protecting civilians.
Regional security	Involvement of Israel, Iran, Palestinian structures, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen and external actors.	Creates the risk of war spreading beyond the original theater.
Energy	Vulnerability of oil and gas transportation routes.	Affects prices, shipping insurance and global supply chains.
International law	Mutual accusations of violations of humanitarian norms.	Turns law into a field of political struggle.
Philosophy of violence	Combination of security, revenge, trauma and identity.	Leads to the radicalization of political imagination and the dehumanization of the opponent.

The Middle East also demonstrates the weakness of the global humanitarian system. International organizations can document suffering,

provide access-based aid, warn of risks, and generate moral pressure. However, they are not always able to change the behavior of parties to a conflict if that behavior is supported by military necessity, domestic politics, or external alliances. This weakness is especially dangerous when humanitarian collapse is combined with environmental degradation, water scarcity, food insecurity and energy vulnerability. In such conditions, the crisis becomes cumulative: the longer violence continues, the more difficult it becomes to restore not only peace, but also the material foundations of sustainable life.

Therefore, the Middle East should be understood as one of the most concentrated examples of the transition toward a conflict-ridden world order. It shows that modern conflicts are not limited to borders, armies and diplomatic negotiations. They penetrate the systems that support everyday life, namely water, food, energy, housing, health, waste management, transport and natural resources. This is why the Middle East is central to the general argument of the article: the crisis of world order is simultaneously a crisis of humanitarian protection and a crisis of sustainable development.

6. Venezuelan direction and the presence of the United States of America

The Venezuelan case is of particular importance for understanding the contemporary world order because it combines several key themes. Among them are energy, authoritarianism, migration, sanctions, regional security, external intervention, and the question of the legitimacy of political transition. Unlike Ukraine or the Middle East, Venezuela is not just a military case. It is a case of controlled or forced transition, where external influence can be presented as stabilization, but at the same time can be perceived as a violation of sovereignty.

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In 2026, American policy towards Venezuela became the subject of heated debate. The Council on Foreign Relations described the confrontation between the United States of America and Venezuela as a separate conflict case, associated with military actions, the detention of Nicolás Maduro, and an attempt at further political realignment (Council on Foreign Relations, 2026). The Brookings Institution viewed the special operation of January 3, 2026, as an event with direct implications for U.S. foreign policy, international law, and the future of Venezuela (Brookings Institution, 2026).

Reuters reported that in December 2025, the White House had ordered U.S. military forces to focus on enforcing the quarantine of Venezuelan oil, indicating the use of economic pressure as a primary tool to influence Caracas. In January 2026, Reuters also reported the seizure by U.S. forces of another Venezuelan-related tanker in the Caribbean Sea, demonstrating the shift from sanctions pressure to maritime control (Reuters, 2025; Reuters, 2026). Such actions show that oil is not merely an economic commodity. It is a geopolitical resource that can be used to pressure political regimes, influence maritime routes, redistribute energy flows and reshape regional power relations. Therefore, the Venezuelan direction illustrates how natural resources become both the object and the instrument of conflict in a world order marked by growing instability.

The philosophical issue in this case is the line between assisting a political transition and external governance. If a regime is deemed authoritarian, corrupt, or a threat to regional security, does this give a foreign state the right to intervene forcefully? If not, what should be the limits of sanctions, diplomatic pressure, and military presence? If so, who determines the criteria for the legitimacy of such intervention? These questions acquire additional complexity when political

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transition is connected with access to oil, gas, minerals, ports, refineries and energy infrastructure. In such conditions, the language of democratization may overlap with the material interests of external actors, while the sovereignty of a weaker state becomes vulnerable to strategic calculations related to natural resources.

Venezuela shows that the unipolar trajectory has not completely disappeared. The United States, even in the world of a rising China, still retains the ability to act as a key power actor in the Western Hemisphere. At the same time, such action is no longer perceived as unquestionable. China, Russia, and parts of Latin America and the Global South may interpret it as a manifestation of neocolonial intervention or as confirmation of the double standards of Western policy. This perception is strengthened by the fact that Venezuela is not only a political case, but also a resource case. The country's oil wealth, mineral potential and geographical position in the Caribbean make it a strategic space where questions of democracy, sovereignty, energy security and external influence intersect.

That is why the Venezuelan case is important for the general theme of the article. It shows that the new world order is not simply a transition from American hegemony to Chinese dominance. Instead, a space is emerging where several centers of power simultaneously claim the right to interpret legitimacy. In such a space, a democratic transition can be both a real need for society and a convenient justification for external control. The Venezuelan direction also shows that sustainable development becomes extremely fragile when political legitimacy, sanctions, energy dependence, migration and institutional collapse are combined in one crisis. Under such conditions, the ability of society to

guarantee food access, employment, public services, environmental protection and social stability is significantly weakened.

The energy aspect of the Venezuelan issue cannot be ignored either. Venezuela has some of the largest oil reserves in the world, but its energy infrastructure has been in a state of degradation for many years. That is why the issue of political transition is inseparable from the issue of access to resources, modernization of the oil and gas sector, the participation of foreign companies and the redistribution of geo-economic influence in the Caribbean. At the same time, political transition under external pressure does not guarantee sustainable democratization. The historical experience of Latin America shows that regime change without deep institutional reconstruction can recreate old problems in a new political form. For Venezuela, the main question is not only who will lead the state after the crisis, but also whether the new government will be able to ensure legal certainty, social inclusion, control of corruption and the trust of citizens.

7. Comparative assessment of crises and calculation of the geopolitical tension index

To summarize the comparative analysis, an author's index of geopolitical tension is proposed. Its goal is not mathematical absoluteness, but systematization of qualitative analysis. The index is calculated according to five criteria, each of which is rated on a scale from 0 to 5.

The first criterion is military intensity, which reflects the scale of the open use of force, the frequency of hostilities and the risk of further escalation. The second criterion is humanitarian severity, which takes into account civilian casualties, population displacement, destruction of housing, lack of water, food,

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medical care and basic services. The third criterion is economic, energy and trade impact. The fourth criterion is the erosion of international legal and institutional norms. The fifth criterion is the level of global polarization.

The weights of the criteria are set taking into account the fact that the military and humanitarian components are of the greatest importance for assessing the severity of the crisis. Economic and energy impacts, as well as the erosion of norms, have a slightly lower, but still high, weight. Polarization is given the lowest weight, as it does not always directly imply greater humanitarian burden, but it does affect the possibility of a diplomatic settlement.

The calculation formula is as follows. $IGN = 0.25 \times BI + 0.25 \times GT + 0.20 \times \text{EETB} + 0.20 \times \text{EETB} + 0.10 \times PGI$. In this formula, IGN stands for the geopolitical tension index, BI stands for military intensity, GT stands for humanitarian severity, EETB stands for economic, energy and trade impacts, EETB stands for the erosion of international legal norms, and PGI stands for the level of global polarization (Table 6).

Table 6. Calculation of the authorial geopolitical tension index

Case	MI	HG	EETI	EIN	LGP	Index
China	2	1	5	3	5	2.85
Ukraine	5	4	4	5	5	4.55
Middle East	5	5	5	5	4	4.90
Venezuela	3	2	4	4	4	3.25

The results show that the Middle East has the highest integral index due to the simultaneous combination of military intensity, humanitarian catastrophe, energy significance, legal uncertainty and global resonance. The war in Ukraine has a slightly lower, but also critical index, since it is directly related to the issue of territorial integrity, European security and the future of international law.

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The Chinese case has a lower integral index, because it is not an open war in the narrow sense, but its long-term structural impact is extremely high. It is China that creates not an instantaneous, but a historically long-term tension associated with the change in the center of the world economy and diplomacy.

Venezuela has an intermediate index. It is not equal in scale to the war in Ukraine or the Middle East, but it is important because it raises questions about the limits of external intervention, energy security and the renewal of the practice of spheres of influence.

Discussions

The results allow us to formulate several important conclusions of a debatable nature. First, the modern world order is not collapsing in one moment. It is fragmenting. Its organizations continue to exist, but their capacity for coercion, coordination, and moral authority is weakening. The UN, international judicial mechanisms, humanitarian agencies, sanctions regimes, and multilateral forums remain important, but increasingly they react to crises after they have unfolded, rather than preventing them. This weakness is especially visible when geopolitical crises affect not only security and law, but also sustainable development, food systems, energy infrastructure, water access, maritime routes and natural resources. In such conditions, international organizations are forced to respond simultaneously to military escalation, humanitarian suffering, economic shocks and ecological degradation, while their preventive capacity remains limited.

Second, multipolarity does not necessarily mean a more just world. Sometimes it just means more centers of coercion. If unipolarity created the

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problem of excessive power of one actor, then conflict polycentricity creates the problem of competition between several actors, each with its own vision of legitimacy. In addition, each center of power may promote its own model of development, resource governance, energy security and food-system resilience. Therefore, the transition toward a polycentric world order does not automatically create more balanced development. It may also intensify competition for ports, minerals, oil, gas, agricultural land, water resources and technological standards.

Third, China, the war in Ukraine, the Middle East, and Venezuela demonstrate different forms of the same crisis. China shows a structural shift in power. The war in Ukraine shows the crisis of legal deterrence of aggression. The Middle East shows the crisis of humanitarian universality. Venezuela shows the crisis of sovereignty under external pressure. At the same time, all four cases show that the crisis of world order has a material dimension. China demonstrates the strategic importance of infrastructure, supply chains and resource access. The war in Ukraine demonstrates the vulnerability of grain markets, energy systems and reconstruction capacity. The Middle East demonstrates the fragility of water access, humanitarian supply and ecological security. Venezuela demonstrates the dependence of political transition on oil, mineral resources and degraded energy infrastructure.

Fourth, the humanitarian component has become central to geopolitics. In the 19th and 20th centuries, great powers could speak mainly in the language of territories and balances. In the 21st century, they still operate in the language of force, but are forced to justify it in the language of humanitarian necessity, democratic transition, protection of civilians, or the fight against terrorism. This is where the moral tension arises. If humanitarian language is used selectively, it loses its persuasiveness.

Fifth, the wars and crises of recent years return to the philosophical question of the nature of power. Power in the modern world is not only military. It is financial, technological, logistical, informational, legal, and symbolic. China operates through infrastructure and credit. Russia operates through military aggression. Israel and its adversaries operate through security and identity narratives. The United States of America operates in Venezuela through a combination of military presence, political pressure, and energy interests.

In this context, the concept of conflict polycentricity better reflects the current reality than the simple concept of multipolarity. Multipolarity can mean a certain balance between centers of power. Conflict polycentricity means that there are several such centers, but they do not share a common vision of the rules. They can interact, trade, negotiate, and at the same time undermine each other through sanctions, information campaigns, military alliances, energy pressure, or infrastructure dependencies.

Another important aspect is that modern crises have different temporal depths. The Chinese challenge is long-term and structural. The war in Ukraine is acute and at the same time long-term, because its consequences will go far beyond the military phase. The Middle East has a historical duration that goes back decades. Venezuela combines a short-term political operation with a long history of resource dependence and regional intervention. Thus, the new order is not formed by a single event, but by the superposition of different historical rhythms. Finally, the modern world once again raises the question of humanitarian universality. If civilians in different wars are politically evaluated unequally, the international order loses its moral basis. If law is applied selectively, it ceases to be law in the full sense and turns into an instrument of political struggle. That is why future stability depends not only on the balance of

power, but also on the ability to restore trust in universal humanitarian standards. However, this trust cannot be restored without protecting the material conditions of life. Food, water, housing, energy, medical infrastructure, safe land, clean environment and responsible natural-resource governance are not secondary technical issues. They are central elements of human dignity and global stability. Therefore, the transition toward a conflict-ridden world order should be understood not only as a crisis of law and power, but also as a crisis of sustainable development.

Conclusions

The study showed that the modern world order is not just in a state of crisis, but in a state of deep structural transformation. A key feature of this transformation is the transition from liberal unipolarity to conflict polycentricity, in which several centers of power simultaneously claim the right to define rules, interpret legitimacy, and shape political transitions. At the same time, this transformation increasingly affects not only diplomacy, international law and military security, but also sustainable development, food security, energy stability, water access, environmental resilience and the governance of natural resources.

China in this system appears as a long-term structural competitor to the West. Its influence is based not only on economic scale, but also on the ability to form infrastructural, financial, and diplomatic dependencies. The Chinese model does not always offer open ideological confrontation, but it actually calls into question the universality of the liberal international order. In addition, China's rise demonstrates that infrastructure, ports, logistics corridors, critical minerals, energy projects, agricultural cooperation and technological standards can

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become instruments of structural influence. Therefore, the Chinese vector should be interpreted not only as a geopolitical challenge, but also as a factor that reshapes the material foundations of global development and resource governance.

The war in Ukraine showed that international law remains morally and politically necessary, but its coercive ability is limited. This war has become a test for Europe, the UN, sanctions regimes, international criminal responsibility, and the very idea of territorial integrity. At the same time, it has led to large-scale militarization, increased defense spending, and a rethinking of security as a basic condition of political existence. However, the war has also shown that aggression against a sovereign state can undermine global food security, destroy agricultural and energy infrastructure, disrupt maritime logistics, damage land resources and create long-term reconstruction challenges. Thus, the war in Ukraine is not only a crisis of international law, but also a crisis of sustainable development.

The Middle East has revealed the humanitarian limit of modern geopolitics. Its crisis shows that the secure existence of some groups cannot be sustainably built on the long-term humiliation, displacement, or dehumanization of others. Water, housing, medical care, food, and child protection are no longer secondary humanitarian issues, but central categories of the world order.

The Venezuelan trend demonstrates the return of the problem of external interference in political transition. The presence of the United States of America in the region can be interpreted as an attempt at stabilization, but at the same time it opens up the risk of resuming the practice of spheres of influence, in

which the sovereignty of the weaker state depends on the strategic interests of the stronger.

The author's index of geopolitical tension showed that the most concentrated crisis of the modern order is the Middle East, followed by the war in Ukraine, then the Venezuelan trend, and Chinese structural competition. At the same time, China's lower score does not mean less historical significance. On the contrary, it is the Chinese vector that may have the most lasting consequences, because it changes not only current security, but also the very architecture of the world economy and diplomacy.

In conclusion, it should be noted that the 21st century. has brought neither the final triumph of law nor a complete return to classical power politics. It has formed a more complex world in which law, force, humanitarian morality, technology, infrastructure and economic dependence operate simultaneously. That is why the future world order will depend not only on who has more resources, but also on who can offer a more convincing answer to the questions of justice, security and human dignity in the age of conflict polycentricity.

Thus, the central conclusion of the study is that the transition toward a conflict-ridden world order is simultaneously a geopolitical, legal, humanitarian and sustainability crisis. China, the war in Ukraine, the Middle East and the Venezuelan direction of the United States of America demonstrate that modern conflicts and rivalries increasingly penetrate the systems that sustain everyday life: food, water, energy, infrastructure, land, logistics and natural resources. Therefore, the stability of the future world order will depend not only on the balance of power, but also on the ability of international actors to protect the ecological and resource foundations of human survival.

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Author contribution statement (CRediT):

Maj, Julian: Conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, investigation, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing.

Krąkowska, Ewa: Conceptualization, validation, resources, supervision, writing – review & editing, project administration.

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Funding:

This study did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Declaration of conflict of interest and originality

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