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Role of Political Communication in the Formation of a New World System: The Use of Soft Lie Diplomacy in Global Crisis Context

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Abstract

Political communication plays a starring role in geostrategic crises such as those experienced in disputed areas like Tibet, Kashmir, Crimea, Senkaku Island, Israel and Palestine, North and South Korea, Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the Caucasus, Cyprus, Northern Ireland, Somaliland, etc. just to name few, and currently the issues of Ukraine and Taiwan. The two last mentioned cases are particular insofar as they trigger both geopolitical and geostrategic alliances of the most powerful countries in the world and put into question the matters of Western hegemony, the multi-polarization of the world and the equilibrium of powers. In so doing, every block uses all means – including soft power, hard power, smart power and ‘soft lie diplomacy’ – to handle the ongoing crisis. Actually, at present-day, in the available literature there is hardly any investigative research that focuses on the use of Soft Lie Diplomacy in political communication. Hence, analyzing the contrasting forces in terms of a new multi-polarization of the world through BRICS and G7 – following the geopolitical crises in Ukraine and Taiwan – could generate interesting discussions in academia. Therefore, this comparative study digs out the contrasting powers between the BRICS and G7 member states both economically, politically and militarily. This will certainly be a considerable contribution to the advancement of the academic literature regarding this phenomenon. Indeed, this study helps us comprehending that BRICS member states have the potential to overtake the G7 in the long run. As a matter of fact, geopolitical alliances are being formed by BRICS' block to get rid of Western hegemony. Throughout the analysis, it was possible to decipher the geostrategic interests hidden behind Russian and Ukrainian conflict, as well as the imminent crisis in Taiwan. Also, if nothing is done to solve diplomatically the tensions in Taiwan, the specter of a Third World War is predicable.

Keywords: BRICS, G7, Global crisis, Geopolitics, Geostrategic competition, NATO, Soft lie diplomacy, Taiwan, Ukraine

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1. Introduction

The whole world is in turmoil. As the researcher at the French Institute for International Relations (IFRI) and director of the Russia/New Independent States Center, Tatiana Kastouéva-Jean, put it:

We are witnessing a movement of tectonic plates. Many countries are in the process of reviewing their foreign policy. For example, neutral countries are now seeking to get closer to NATO's formal membership; there is a demand for more consultation and coordination.

(Geopolitis, 2022)

Indeed, before the start of the clashes between Russia and Ukraine, American President Joe Biden and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin spoke by video interposed on December 7, 2021 to discuss the tensions which have increased around the Ukrainian affair. Washington accused Moscow of massing troops on the Ukrainian border, raising the threat of an invasion of its neighbor. For its part, the Kremlin accused the United States of wanting to integrate Ukraine into NATO, which it would see as a direct attack on its national security.

On the other side of the hemisphere, tensions are increasing in Asia. China wants to establish its authority in this part of the world and looks at Taiwan with an incandescent and menacing eye. However, the United States does not want to let its place as the world's leading power slip away without reacting. If China threatens American hegemony, other countries indeed have a thirst for empire: Russia, Turkey and Iran to name but a few, for example. On the armament side, the Russians developed hypersonic weapons in response to the development of the American anti-missile shield in the early 2000s. Thus, demonstrations of force multiplied terror on both sides. The Australian submarine affair, the Indian army's purchases of bursts, the hypersonic missile tests show that armies everywhere are preparing for a major, high-intensity conflict.

This comparative study of the antagonistic forces of NATO and BRICS is intended to be exploratory and focuses on the bipolarization of the global superpower generated by the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. To do this, it relies on a content analysis methodology based on already existing archive documents and primary sources such as official speeches, conference reports, resolutions, agreements and conventions of international organizations, etc.

From the outset, the question should be asked as to what strategic competition has the Russian-Ukrainian conflict created or will it create between the BRICS states and those of NATO. Is the world in danger of tipping over to a nuclear war or at least is there the risk of the explosion of a third world war? Can the different antagonistic blocks be reconciled one day? In terms of political communication how do the two antagonistic camps communicate? Is there any possibility of dialogue? So many questions that will constitute the main points of this research work.

2. Soft Lie Diplomacy: A Complementarity Between Soft Power and Strategic Diplomacy

The Italian philosopher Machiavelli (1532) stated that in political realm we are not required to tell the truth. He claimed that in political domain the dominance of people is organized around illusions and appearances. For him, a good political leader is not the one who gives people what they really need; but rather the one who succeeds in making people believe that he gives them what they want (Machiavelli, 1532). This entails the use of what I conceptualize as 'Soft Lie Diplomacy'. Actually the notion of *Soft Lie Diplomacy* is a combination of Hard power, Soft power, Smart power, and strategic diplomacy mechanisms. This is what can be observed in a context of generalized global crisis as testified the current situation in Ukraine and in Taiwan. Each protagonist or block blames the other of being responsible of fuelling the crisis. Both sides use all means to justify their misconducts, diplomatic approach and military operations.

In 1990 the American Professor and Academic Joseph Nye coined the concept 'Soft Power' to depict the use of soft mechanisms such as culture, pop music and art by politics to subjugate their foreign peers. Notwithstanding, beyond the prevailing aspect of hard power (military and economic strength) and the use of soft power's tools (cultural attractiveness), politics often resort to communicational and informational power to cleanse their image. Hence, communication and information turn out to be vital for political figures; helping them to show their attractiveness and influence. International political actors have always believed that

communicating to foreign audiences is crucial to their interests (Craig, 2012). Thus, they sometimes do not hesitate to give false statements to polish up and refine their image towards the local and international communities. That is nothing else but a strategical use of *Soft Lie Diplomacy*.

Contextually speaking, the concept of 'Soft Lie Diplomacy' is similar to the definition of 'white lie'. The French Grand Robert dictionary defines the latter as "a trivial, diplomatic or well-intentioned untruth." Yet, political actors usually tell lies to show their muscles, to be protected from security threats like terrorism, to create new alliances with other states, or even to give an appearance of powerful leadership for electioneering (Curtice and Hunjan, 2009). Soft Lie Diplomacy can also be used to attract investors, to charm foreign peers and to appeal international supports in various domains. Therefore, both hard power, smart power and soft power are somehow diluted in the strategical use of 'soft lie diplomacy'.

The concept 'Smart Power' is defined by Ernest J Wilson III¹ as the combination of both 'hard power' and 'soft power' elements. Thence, 'Soft lie diplomacy' can be considered as a complementarity between the concept of 'soft power' and its corollary concept of 'smart power' accompanied by strategic diplomacy. As an illustration, the combination of all these elements is perceptible after the shelling near the Zaporizhzhia plant. Indeed, Russia and Ukraine have been continuously blaming one another amid the bombardments of the Zaporizhzhia plant, known as Europe's largest nuclear power plant.

Etymologically, 'lie' can be defined as the contrary of the 'truth'. It is therefore fundamentally an intention to betray, to deceive; that is to say to conceal the reality, the fact, the truth. From its Old English root 'legan, ligan, or leogan' which means literally "to deceive, to belie or to betray"; the term *lie* refers contextually to "tell an untruth; to speak falsely"² for the purpose of misleading. However, how bad is a white lie? Or better, what is the repercussion of the soft lie diplomacy? It depends on (1) the context; (2) who the protagonist is; (3) how trivial the lie is; and (4) what the truth is. As all politics might know, the best way to win elections is to make-up the truth with soft lie mechanisms. People do not want political elites to tell them that the percentage of joblessness is high and then the economy is bad so that the government is digging a deep hole of debt; making things difficult to be overcome. No, none wants to hear such a blatant truth. People need political leaders who are able to provide immediate solutions to their problems. Whence, using 'soft lie diplomacy' seems not to be a crime but to reassure the citizens. The crime is the fact of not being able to ensure the promises with concrete actions.

Seen from the political communication perspective, the concept *soft lie diplomacy* appears to be traditionally associated with thought, or intelligence in action. Sometimes, lying gives the impression to be necessary in politics. On occasion, its outcome is neutral and, in that case, it changes profoundly the thread of reality, especially when it happens in a crucial context of political crisis. In this regard, the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard (1988) reminded us that the *Simulacra* are small arrangements with the truth and untruths so confidently asserted that they end up becoming true. That is what Baudrillard termed as 'hyper-reality'. In politics, the dream of a transparent society has resulted in a totalitarian nightmare. This state of fact brings about the concept of *soft lie diplomacy*. Lying is at first sight incompatible with the democratic ideal, which it perverts. However, it seems to become inherent in political activity, even if it has become more difficult today with the advent of digital media which promote easily the success of conspiracy theories.

Today, more than the previous decades, in public as well as in private life, the lie and its opposite, the truth, occupy ambivalent positions. The soft lie diplomacy attains its paroxysm in authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. The press is muzzled to serve as propaganda tools. Democracy and freedom of speech are under threat. That is the case for example in Israel or in Saudi Arabian Kingdom. Indeed, to contextualize it in the Arab Monarchy, the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman knows how to utilise media to strengthen his power. According to the professor Piscatori (1983), convergence of political and religious interests led to an alliance of great importance in Saudi Kingdom. Thus, as a savvy populist, the Saudi Prince exerts full control

¹ Ernest James Wilson III (1948) is an American scholar. Wilson was the Walter Annenberg Chair in Communication, and Dean of the Annenberg School for Communication (USC Annenberg) at the University of Southern California (USC), Los Angeles, California from 2007-2017.

² *Etymology Dictionary*: Available Online at <https://www.etymonline.com/word/lie>

and meticulous surveillance on media ecosystem present in his kingdom. Consequently, the murder of *The Washington Post* columnist Jamal Khashoggi³ in 2018 reminded us that the fight for freedom of expression, human rights and media depolitization in Saudi Arabian Kingdom still has a long way to go. As a matter of fact, Khashoggi's assassination has been attempted to be solved through the use of *soft lie diplomacy* by Saudi government but it failed to have the complicity of the Turkish authorities. In fact, according to Wolker (2009), freedom of expression is in danger in the Arab world because the region is immune to democracy. Since the Holy Qur'an is the constitution of the Kingdom; there could be no 'check and balance system' in Saudi Arabia. Accordingly, political leaders have used Islam to legitimize their system of governance (Piscatori, 1983). As a result, soft lie diplomacy is sometimes uttered in the aim of covering state secrets. This means that the secrecy is associated with higher values, with moral good.

2.1. *Soft Lie Diplomacy and the Moral Good Standpoint*

Soft Lie Diplomacy can serve as safeguarding of moral good. In political communication, no one lies without a valid reason. Even during electoral campaigns political figures may tell lies for the pleasure of giving a flattering image of themselves. In any case, the truth is not sacrificed for nothing; they sacrifice it to what might be considered as partial good. That is to say, the lie is worth covering either a public interest, or a purely self-interested value. In this perspective, Paul Valéry⁴ argued that "what forces people to tell a lie is the feeling that it is impossible for others to understand their action. Even a complicated lie is simpler than the truth itself (...)" (Huisman, 1985). As an illustration, on February 5, 2003, the US Secretary of Defence Colin Powell presented evidence to the United Nations of weapons of mass destruction that led to the invasion of Iraq: "Colleagues, every statement I make is based on sources, solid sources. These are not assertions. What we are giving you are facts and conclusions based on concrete intelligence"⁵ (Powell, 2003). Later on, the investigations proved that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. It was all about soft lie diplomacy.

Nonetheless, telling the truth should be an obligation, a duty. Given the fact that the definition of duty is assimilated to moral or legal obligation, the notion of duty becomes inseparable from the concept of rights. Indeed, in 1988 the Canadian philosopher Jan Narveson (1988) reminded us that in libertarian philosophy every duty (responsibility) corresponds to someone else's right; because where there is no right, there is no duty. In consequence, the soft lie diplomacy is somehow valid when it is applied as a duty to serve a common interest or to cover moral good. According to the German thinker Emmanuel Kant, however, the lie should never be justified because it is morally wrong; and accordingly, it is doubly reprehensible since it:

- Deteriorates the moral capacity of human beings;
- Thwarts people from thinking rationally and freely. Put it differently, the lie demoralises the dignity of others.

Thus, the philosopher Emmanuel Kant claimed that every human being is born with a kind of 'intrinsic value'. Hence, this intrinsic value is considered as the human dignity. Seen from the Ethical formalism's angle of view⁶, any right to tell a lie is purely disproved.

Furthermore, the Utilitarian Approach evaluates human actions in terms of results, outcomes or consequences ensued. In other words, utilitarianism is an ethical theory that distinguishes the right from the wrong by

³ Jamal Khashoggi was one of the rare journalists who dared to raise his voice against Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's authoritarian governance. He frequently denounces the Kingdom's foreign policy regarding the diplomatic relationships with Qatar and the habitual tensions with Lebanon, Yemen and Iran. Khashoggi also used to criticize the regime's tyranny against News workers and journalists in Saudi Kingdom, and in Arab world more generally, through the columns of Washington Post. Hence, his voice was silenced on October 2018 in the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul.

⁴ Paul Valéry (1871-1945) was a French Author, poet, essayist, critic, philosopher and epistemologist. From the scientific perspective, he was one of the most influential personalities of the 20th century. He wrote a large number of essays and occasional papers on literary topics and took a great interest in scientific discoveries and in political problems.

⁵ Secretary of State Colin Powell; "Remarks to the United Nations Security Council", New York City, February 5, 2003. Online accessibility: <http://www.state.gov/secretary/former/Powell/remarks/2003/17300.ytm> - Quoted by Thomas Mockaitis in *The Iraq War: A Documentary and Reference Guide* (2012); Kindle edition.

⁶ *Ethical formalism* is an ethical theory which defines moral as something logical and rational. As a consequence, if something is wrong it remains wrong all the time without exception. This Kantian theory is developed in the Masterpiece entitled: *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, tr. H.J. Paton. London. 1948.

concentrating only on the outcomes. According to this theory, the lie or the truth should be assessed by estimation between advantages and disadvantages. Correspondingly, the utilitarian moral reasoning is nowadays predominant in political discussions. Concretely, when the soft lie diplomacy maximizes the benefits of a situation, the utilitarian approach finds it moral; and thus, it would be normal to apply it in the aim of prioritizing the common interests. In consequence, utilitarianism considers the soft lie diplomacy as a plausible option amongst other possibilities to resolve a crisis. Similarly, a doctor who uses the soft lie to tell his patients about their chances of survival, in the intention of allowing them to enjoy the few remaining time, corresponds to a utilitarian logic.

Although the lie seems to be immoral a priori, no society or government is immune to lies. In the political domain especially, the soft lie diplomacy tends to become omnipresent during crisis contexts. The proliferation of fake news, mis[dis]communication and propaganda becomes the resultant of soft lie diplomacy. Subsequently, information, rumours, mis[dis]information and propaganda compete every day in the media – especially on social media platforms – generating de facto a cacophony of contradictory news in the public sphere. Several versions of different facts nurtured by soft lies are intermingling and spreading from all sides; creating an epidemic of fake news at global political echelons. This is what we can observe after the explosion of Russian and Ukrainian crisis.

3. Historical Reminder and Contemporary Facts about Russian and Ukrainian Crisis

In the early 1990s, Russia and the Western world agreed to end the war and build a new world. At the time, Mikhail Gorbachev spoke of a “common European home”, and a military alliance including the United States, Europe and Russia was even considered. Thirty years later, it is with Asia that Russia forges a military alliance and economic contracts. For their part, the United States and Europe (the Global West) have largely turned their backs on Russia. Since the annexation of Crimea, heavy economic sanctions have been taken against Moscow. On both sides, provocations with gigantic war demonstrations or military infrastructure installations are more and more numerous.

The war in Ukraine has shifted geopolitical lines even in some Latin American states. Nicolas Maduro’s regime, which the Trump administration has unsuccessfully tried to overthrow, is Moscow’s main ally in Latin America. It is also a major oil producer, which was refined in the United States before the country fell into Chavez’s anti-imperialism and its economy collapsed. With the war in Ukraine and the embargo on Russian oil decreed on March 8, 2022 by the Biden administration, the barriers are falling. The oil market chessboard needs to be reviewed, and Venezuela one of the pawns to be moved.

The new German Chancellor, Olaf Scholz, and the French President, Emmanuel Macron, each spoke of “the new era” in which Russia has just rushed Europe. This new era closes the three decades of the post-Cold War, opened by the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Kauffmann, 2022).

In November 1989, when the Berlin Wall fell down, the old division of the world between East and West was supposed to be a thing of the past. The ideological conflict between capitalism and communism was supposed to evaporate for good. The problem is that for Vladimir Putin, a former KGB officer based in East Germany, the collapse of the former Soviet Union seems to have turned into a bitter personal resentment that has deepened over the years. The fact that Ukraine, once an essential part of the USSR, broke away from the Russian Federation was an insult to everything Putin believed in Simpson (2022).

In 2014, Vladimir Putin spotted a way to take over Crimea, the most symbolically Russian part of Ukraine, by infiltrating his soldiers into the peninsula. After holding a referendum, he made it an integrated part of the Russian state. The speeches and sanctions of the antagonist parties will not be able to change anything. The mere suggestion that Ukraine might one day join NATO – although it has always been considered unlikely – infuriated the Kremlin and won in persuading Vladimir Putin that he had to settle accounts with Ukraine once and for all.

Over the past decade, Russia has begun to form a new bloc with China – not necessarily hostile to the West, but mutually supportive in the face of Western criticism. Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin have established a mutual support group. Today, China refuses to condemn Russia for its actions in Ukraine, and the people of

Taiwan, the separatist territory that Xi Jinping has always refused to say he will not invade, are beginning to wonder if it will not be their turn.

4. Geopolitical Alliances to Get Rid of Western Hegemony

In 1996, China and the former USSR set up the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to settle border issues between the two federal powers. This intergovernmental security and economic cooperation structure brings together Moscow, Beijing, most Central Asian countries such as Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and, since 2017, India and Pakistan.

Besides Xi Jinping's China, Putin's partners have multiplied over time. Russia and Iran are consolidating diplomatic ties as the West increases its sanctions. A new 7000 km long commercial train line was inaugurated recently. This line, not only economically but also militarily, connects Russia to India via Iran. The most important axes of this essential rail route are: Saint Petersburg, Moscow, Astrakhan, Baku, Bandar Abbas and Mumbai.

As Chinese and Russian ambitions become more pressing, should we see the emergence of another model of international relations, as opposed to the world order designed by Westerners after World War II?

Business continues between the two BRICS giants [Moscow and Beijing]. As economic and diplomatic sanctions rain down on Russia, it is therefore a real snub to the international community with what is already shaping up to be the largest natural gas supply contract in history. The construction of this gas pipeline which will link Siberia to China by crossing Mongolia will have a capacity of 50 billion cubic per year, i.e., almost the same volume as the famous Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline which was to link Russia to Germany and whose authorization was suspended following the sanctions.

The construction of this gas pipeline is good business for China. The country is experiencing a bulimia of energy. In winter 2023, power shortages have shut down thousands of factories. This demonstrates that Russian gas is therefore also a godsend for the second largest economy in the world, which is signing a strategic contract to build a real parallel economy to the great displeasure of Western countries. Liu Xinwei, researcher in an economic intelligence firm in Beijing, explains it as it follows:

Russia exports 650 million cubic meters of natural gas per day, which represents a quarter of the world trade, 85% of which was exported to Europe. Because during the conflict, the gas exported from Russia to Europe through the gas pipeline system is necessarily affected.

(Géopolitis, 2022)

The geopolitical influence of the BRICS extends to Africa. By taking advantage of France's loss of influence in these former colonies, Russia, under the guise of bringing stability, is imposing itself in certain countries regularly plagued by conflict. This is the case, for example, of the Central African Republic and Mali, which support the presence of Russians in their respective territories. Thus, thanks to the services of Wagner Group (a secret army of mercenaries in the service of Kremlin), in exchange for mineral resources, the regimes of Faustin-Archange Touadéra in the Republic Central Africa and Assimi Goita in Mali feel safe and protected. This new expansionism of BRICS state members is not only military, but also and overall economically powerful, somehow tailored in the model of the Chinese model.

5. The Gigantesque Expansion of BRICS Through The Chinese Model

In fact, the advent of globalization has, on the contrary, favored the emergence of other powers which have made Western leadership impossible and upset the balance of the planet. In barely twenty years, we have thus gone from a unipolar world with a powerful and dominant [hegemonic] America to an unstable, antagonistic and not always intelligible multipolar world.

The BRICS' giants with Putin's Russia and Jinping's China are setting out to conquer the world. In doing so, they are implementing the "project of the century" according to Chinese President Xi Jinping. Since 2013, China has invested more than \$100 bn to build railways, ports, and economic zones around the world. He calls this project the "New Silk Roads". The aim is to make them the vectors of a new expansionism of China throughout the whole world.

The problem is that this intrusion of Chinese interests makes people cringe. In Gwadar in Pakistan or in the Horn of Africa⁷, the clash of cultures is brutal. From the heart of China in Wuhan to Pakistan, via Djibouti and Ethiopia, Chinese pursue their interests in all countries and are out to conquer the world.

In fact, since 2021, American and Chinese Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping have been facing each other. China now displays its ambition to take first place in all areas – economic, military, diplomatic, cultural and political. This Sino-American competition is decisive for the geopolitical analysis of the new “Multipolar World”. It is a global confrontation, with a clearly identified center of gravity in the Indo-Pacific zone.

Growing Chinese military pressure and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine might remind Taiwanese that a Chinese attack on the island remains technically possible. The island fears the attack of its powerful neighbor, who does not hide his desire for ‘reunification’. Is any resemblance to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict purely coincidental? The confrontation could also be military someday over the issue of Taiwan. The question now is that if tensions continue to rise between the European Union, the United States and Russia, the G7 forces will not be able to manage both China and Russia if the conflict lasts long. They will certainly have to choose between Taiwan and Ukraine.

In fact, China is trying to blame Taiwan for initiating a military confrontation, but Taiwan is careful not to be the first to pull the trigger. The outcome of the war (the military operation for the Russians) in Ukraine has set a major precedent for the attitude to be adopted by China and Taiwan in moving towards a resolution of the political and territorial dispute which divides them. In any case, Taiwan is careful not to give its adversary the advantage of being the first to attack by simulating without restraint a major attack by China at very short notice. The omnipresence of the United States, an ally of Taiwan, both to defend democracy and its positions in the region encourages China to be ready to confront the United States militarily on Taiwanese territory by attacking the Taiwanese army.

The threat of a conflict between China and the United States is worrying around Taiwan, which Chinese President Xi Jinping describes as a ‘rebel island’. This makes Taiwan “the most dangerous place in the world” (*The Economist*, 2022). Notwithstanding, Lionel Fatton, Assistant Professor at the Webster University in Geneva, stated that the most dangerous place in the world is more to be found on the side of “Yemen, the Sahel or Syria”. Yet, he concedes that “if China and the United States must go to war, it will certainly be over Taiwan”.

Alarmist, like James Stavridis, former US Navy officer and commander of the Indo-Pacific forces, who even fears the start of a Third World War around the island of Taiwan. In their book titled “2034: A Novel of the Next World War”, Admiral James Stavridis and Elliot Ackerman imaged as a trigger the assault of a Chinese destroyer on an American combat ship. It is a scenario that he considers “very likely” and which could materialize “well before 2034”, he specifies. With tensions escalating in the Pacific, the staffs of the two superpowers are preparing for the worst.

The Asia-Pacific region is today the most militarized area in the world. The United States is constantly reinforcing its military contingents on the spot, joined by French warships. Taipei is expanding its arsenal, in particular thanks to its powerful American ally, which angers Beijing. Since the beginning of the year, nearly 300 Chinese fighter planes including heavy bombers have buzzed Taiwanese defense radars, crossing the border above the strait that separates Taiwan from mainland China.

Facing Taiwan, the Chinese army displays numerical superiority on land and at sea, and even against the American fleet. The Chinese Navy claims 360 warships, against 300 for the US Navy, which still has the advantage in submarines and aircraft carriers. But for Lionel Fatton, despite this growing Chinese military power, “it is quite unlikely that China, without being provoked, will try to invade Taiwan [...] It would be far too costly,” (Fatton, 2022). The researcher also points out that the Chinese army “is still in the process of modernization” (*Ibid*, 2022). Also, the geographical particularity of Taiwan, surrounded by cliffs, is such that a direct assault on the island would require considerable and very sophisticated military means; without forgetting “the risk of American intervention” (*Ibid*, 2022).

As a caveat, Beijing could instead consider annexing other island territories controlled by Taiwan, such as the small island of Kinmen, very close to the Chinese mainland. “The only reason China could invade Taiwan and have open conflict with the island would be an official declaration of independence from Taiwan” (Fatton, 2022).

⁷ The Horn of Africa includes Eastern African countries like Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti and Somalia.

6. Statistical Comparison Between NATO Member States and BRICS

While NATO has more than 30 member states today, BRICS possesses only 5 member states: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. In addition, during the 14th edition of BRICS summit that was hosted virtually by China on June 23-24, 2022, Argentina and Iran (two of the observer countries) deliberately showed their willingness to apply for BRICS membership. If these two nations joins the five abovementioned BRICS member states, they will definitely constitute a counter-power for the well-known G7 with different objectives. Indeed, BRICS grouping also has about \$46 trillion of GDP and accounts for more than 26% of the global economy; while NATO has roughly \$47 tn GDP.

However, in terms of superficies, BRICS member states have more area than NATO state members: 39 746 220 km² with 3.2 billion of population (which represents 41% of the world) against 24 578 367 km² with 952 million populations for NATO (which is around 12% of the world). When it comes to military power, there is a sort of equilibrium between the two organizations. For instance, NATO has 6,485 nuclear weapons against 7000 for BRICS. Notwithstanding, NATO [with \$1.1 tn] dedicates more defense budget than BRICS [\$432 bn]. Conversely, in terms of human resources BRICS doubles NATO with more than 11 million military services [around 5.7 million active forces for BRICS] against only 5 million [with approximately 3.5 million active military] for its rival. Similarly, NATO possesses only 2,103,000 reserve military against 5,020,000 for BRICS. Oppositely, NATO owns more naval fleet strength than BRICS member states: 2,036 against 1,807.

7. Geopolitical Analysis of Powers

NATO is a creature of the Cold War; marked by the signing of the NATO Treaty in April 1949. This so-called NATO Treaty stated in its Article 5 that “an armed attack on one of the members is considered as an attack against all of them. Consequently, the use of armed force to restore and maintain security should be implemented”. The last countries to join NATO are Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland in 1999, Bulgaria, Estonia, Etonia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovenia, and Slovakia in 2004, Albania and Croatia in 2009, Montenegro in 2017, North Macedonia in 2020, and very recently Finland and eventually Sweden in 2023. The potential future NATO member States were Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, and Ukraine which formally expressed their membership aspirations. But Russian invasion of Ukraine tends to thwart these aspirations.

Following its establishment, the first Post-Cold War International Security Crisis was the Operation Desert storm generated by Saddam Husain’s invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. However, NATO never went into battle until Kosovo in 1999. Later on, NATO was involved in the war in Libya in 2012 and in Afghanistan after 9/11 attack. Interestingly, the decision in 2003 to invade Iraq was not approved by the Security Council. In fact, to create legitimacy it was necessary to get the approval of the international community through a savvy strategical use of soft lie diplomacy. Curiously, lots of countries were admitted to NATO in 2004, as to give more legitimacy to the Iraqi invasion.

BRICS member states have the potential to overtake the G7 in the long run. While observing the prospective and potential for forthcoming investment opportunities in the global markets, O’Neil (2001) predicted that the BRICS member states would grow faster and quicker, and also their economies would be superior comparatively to those of the G7; and consequently, the BRICS member states would dominate the global economy by 2040 (O’Neil, 2001; Salih, 2006; Wilson *et al.*, 2008). Hence, this move in economic supremacy could have direct ramifications for policy makers, economic and political decision-makers, as well as for some transnational business organizations.

In doing so, the upcoming decades will certainly witness a decline in the mutual weightiness of the G7 in the global economy and this will limit considerably their aptitude to influence other states via policy initiatives. As a result, the implementation of a development bank will obviously jeopardize the hegemony of the well-known economic institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (Sharma, 2012) which promote the hegemony of the dollar currency. This will inevitably entail the ‘*dedolarization*’ of the global economy. In short, BRICS member states are undergoing both internally and externally challenges and worries, especially in the security and military sectors, marked by geopolitical ramifications. Those challenges should be overcome urgently in order to assure the current economic growth and geostrategic evolutions of BRICS member states for a matter of competitiveness.

8. Geopolitical Drawbacks Behind Russian-Ukrainian Conflict

The Russian invasion caused Ukraine to lose its key cities like Severodonetsk and Lysychansk and that of Azovstal. For now, the initiative clearly lies with the Russian camp, and the Federation is in a position to wage war for several more months if it chooses. On the Western side, all the press of influence is mobilized to support Ukraine, but it seems clear that – apart from the deliveries of rocket launchers, multiple HIMARS, the sharing of intelligence, and promises to supply cluster munitions – beyond political speeches, absolutely nothing decisive is concretely done to support Volodymyr Zelensky.

The outcome of the conflict is predictable: Putin's plan would be to take Donbass and impose a peace treaty that is favorable to him. Despite fierce Ukrainian resistance, the Kremlin's grip is slowly tightening in the southeast of the country. The Russian army, which announced in early July 2022 that it had taken control of the Lugansk region, is now in Donetsk, which is subject to systematic shelling.

At the same time, on the international scene, the tone has gone up a notch between Westerners and Russia. Thus, during the meeting of G20 foreign ministers, held in Bali on July 7 and 8, 2022, the head of Russian diplomacy, Sergei Lavrov, left the meeting even before the end of the debates. Faced with criticism of the war in Ukraine, the Russian minister preferred to slam the door, accusing Westerners of wasting an opportunity to address global economic issues. The day before, it was Vladimir Putin who had not gone there by four paths during a meeting with the leaders of the groups in Parliament. The Russian head of state had declared that "Westerners want to defeat us on the battlefield. What to say? Let them try! Serious things have not yet started in Ukraine"; he warned. The next day, President Putin also warned of possible "catastrophic" consequences of Western sanctions for the global energy market.

One is therefore wondering whether this umpteenth threat on his part will be followed by action or is it another attempt to intimidate the Ukrainian President and the Western states that support him. Hard to say for now, but with these words, Vladimir Putin clearly shows his intention: to go all the way. In France, the Minister of the Economy Bruno Le Maire had also considered that it is necessary to prepare for a Russian gas cut which was "the most likely option". And this was absolutely what happened in winter 2022. Faced with this risk, French government has been acting to diversify their sources of gas supply, to increase their capacities with the floating LNG terminal project in Le Havre, and to accelerate storage.

The French executive power is watching with concern what is happening, especially in Germany. The country depends more than France on Russian gas transported by the Nord Stream 1 gas pipeline, which began work from the end of July 2022 for around ten days. From public authorities to companies, some European countries were preparing to have to limit the consumption of hot water, the electricity or even the intensity of public lighting. The new use of more telework and coal-fired power plants was also being considered.

9. The Plausible Aftermath of the Russo-Ukrainian Conflict

Since 2022, panic was sweeping across Europe over the prospect of a shortage of gas to heat and light households. But the energy crisis could persist in the spring and hit industries hard. The throughput of the Nord Stream 1 gas pipeline, which connects Russia to Europe, has been reduced to only 20% of its capacity since the beginning of summer 2022. The price of a megawatt hour of natural gas fell from €40 in July 2021 to more than €200 today. In response to the sanctions adopted by European countries since the beginning of the Russian offensive in Ukraine, Moscow is using the weapon of gas to put pressure on Europe, which is very dependent on it.

Consequently, Europeans are preparing to have to do without Russian gas – which still represented 40% of their imports before the war – much faster than they had previously anticipated ([Laurent Horvath - Geopolitis, 2022](#)). The leaders of the European Union were [and they are still] trying at all costs to fill their gas tanks in anticipation of winter and are also betting on a drop in consumption. Member countries agreed in July 2022 to voluntarily reduce their gas consumption by 15%. In Switzerland, the Federal Council has just aligned itself with this objective. It was also the case in France with the new measures taken by President Emmanuel Macron. If in the spring, heating needs are lower, gas will remain a key element for the operation of many industries, such as metallurgy or the automotive sector. Laurent Horvath is worried about a possible wave of factory closures and layoffs caused by the lack of gas or its excessive price.

On February 27, 2022, three days after the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Vladimir Putin announced that he was putting the Russian army's deterrent forces "on special combat alert". "We know where the war begins, not where it ends", warns Professor Tatiana Kastouéva-Jean who does not exclude that the invasion of Ukraine is the first stage of a larger plan. "In my opinion, the greatest threat weighs today on Moldova, a region of which, Transnistria, has been occupied by Russian troops for thirty years". And it is to ward off this danger that NATO is strengthening its presence in all the neighboring countries of Russia.

Added to this is the question of Taiwan, which is on the brink. Overall, the world is therefore much more worrying than it was a few years ago. Putin succeeded in Crimea nine years ago and his position inside the country has been considerably strengthened. Perhaps he will succeed again, cutting into the Ukrainian Armed Forces, making a few significant gains, then withdrawing quickly and staging a victory parade. So Vladimir Putin, who seems to have launched his attack on Ukraine because of his 30-year resentment over the collapse of the former Soviet empire, could take Russia back to the days of the USSR. This could make Russia more powerful again. But if things turn out differently, the sanctions against Russia will have an effect and Putin's position will suffer. The Russian economy would suffer, and Chinese aid would not compensate for this loss.

10. The Threat of a Third World War on Taiwanese Island

The conflict between Beijing and Taipei has been going on for 70 years. If Taiwan has a government, the Middle Kingdom considers the island as one of its provinces. Pelosi's visit was therefore seen as a serious provocation. Tensions have continued to rise in the Taiwan region since the end of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to the island. Since then, China has been engaged in major military maneuvers and several dozen ballistic missiles were fired over Taiwan in the days following Pelosi's visit. Beijing's military exercises are closely followed in Washington. Similarly, China has also announced that it will end cooperation with the United States on several issues, including climate change.

From Tokyo, where she finished her Asian tour, Nancy Pelosi wanted to calm things down: "This tour was not intended to change the status quo here in Asia, nor to change the status quo in Taiwan" (Geopolitis, 2022). The Taiwanese ambassador to France, François Chihchung Wu, defended the determination of the Taiwanese "to defend themselves in the event of a Chinese attack" considering that they must now "manage the consequences of Nancy Pelosi's visit".

"People republic of China has shown its ambitions and conducts coercive policies that are in contradiction with our interests, our security and our values [...] China represents a systemic challenge for Euro-Atlantic security", stated NATO, on June 29, 2022. Also, on May 23, 2022, American President Joe Biden affirmed that "If some day China invades Taiwan, the US will react militarily". For the Chinese ambassador in France, Lu Shaye, China "wants to solve the problem of Taiwan pacifically, proven that Taiwan does not cross the red line".

A dispute with Taiwan could further exacerbate the global economic crisis as the island stands out in the electronics industry. Geopolitically, China can count on an ally: Russia. The two countries have more and more common interests and the economic and commercial cooperation between them is constantly making progress. Hence the resistance, on both sides, to the hegemony of the American superpower. This Beijing-Moscow axis greatly worries the West. Would an alliance between Russia and China be a threat to the G7 countries? So should we fear an escalation of tensions in the region that could result in a Third World War? Are Moscow and Beijing then in the process of overturning the rules of the "nuclear game" which have conditioned the balance of power between the powers since 1945? Are the treaties allowing the control of nuclear arsenals still effective when new weapons appear?

11. Conclusion

This study helps us comprehending that BRICS member states have the potential to overtake the G7 in the long run. As a matter of fact, geopolitical alliances are being formed by BRICS' block to get rid of Western hegemony. Throughout my analysis, it was possible to decipher the geostrategic interests hidden behind Russian and Ukrainian conflict, as well as the imminent crisis in Taiwan. Also, if nothing is done to solve diplomatically the tensions in Taiwan, the specter of a World War III is predicible. Moreover, I could demonstrate in this study how it is possible for political leaders to utilize soft lie diplomacy in order to strengthen their power and

legitimate their political and military actions. Hence, Soft Lie Diplomacy focuses on made-up political discourses to construct reality.

The Ukrainian crisis is a crisis with multiple consequences. Not only does it cause the shortage of gas in Europe, but also and above all, this crisis has awakened the desire for domination of other powers such as China, which has always kept Taiwan in its rear-view mirror.

Added to all this is the problem of controlling the weapons supplied to Ukraine by the West. These weapons will end up on the black market after the war. Likewise, with financial aid, corruption will constantly increase, since Ukraine is one of the most corrupt countries in the world.

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