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CONTENTS

FIGHTING LIBERALISM WITH LIBERALISM: THE FAILURE OF ANGLOPHONE MARXIST INTELLECTUALS IN THE POST-SOVIET WORLD

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Abstract. The restoration of capitalism in East Europe and the former Soviet Union in the late 1980s and early 1990s revitalised capitalism, setting the stage for the resurgent hegemony of United States imperialism. This was accompanied by its economic reflection, globalisation, and its ideological justification, liberalism. Most Marxists in the Anglophone imperialist world, capitulated to this dominant liberalism (that is, to US imperialist hegemony), converting Marxism into left-wing critiques of liberalism, not a revolutionary tool to overthrow capitalism. This paper in particular examines Alex Callinicos and his treatment of the antiglobalisation movement of the early 2000s. We are now seeing the breakdown of the post-Soviet hegemony of United States imperialism, which is making the world much more unstable. Again, Marxists in the Anglophone imperialist world, instead of using Marxism as a tool to fight against capitalism, are turning it into a liberal tool, in this case by asserting that the current world situation is somehow objectively leading towards socialism. This essay concludes by examining Radhika Desai as an example.

Keywords. Marxism, liberalism, post-Soviet, Alex Callinicos, Radhika Desai, multipolarity, geopolitics, imperialism

EMERGING FROM THE SECOND WORLD WAR, THE UNITED STATES WAS THE LEADER of the capitalist world, industrially, militarily, and politically. The only counterweight to United States imperialism was the Soviet Union and, later, the Eastern bloc countries, where capitalism had been abolished but were not ruled in accordance with the revolutionary internationalist programme of Lenin's Bolsheviks. During the Cold War, the mere existence of the Soviet Union was a threat to the domination of US imperialism; the world was divided into two rival social systems that competed for spheres of influence. As recently as the 1960s and 1970s, with the

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defeat of US imperialism in Vietnam and a series of revolutionary possibilities such as France in 1968, Chile in 1972, and Portugal in 1975, capitalism appeared to be on the back foot. With the lack of a Marxist leadership capable of realising workers' revolution, capitalism was not overthrown, and the bourgeoisie restabilised and went on the offensive (especially in the English-speaking imperialist countries such as Australia, Britain, Canada, and the United States) through a series of attacks on the working class and oppressed, usually called ***neoliberalism***. In the English-speaking imperialist countries, this meant union-busting, exemplified by the air-traffic controllers' strike in the United States in 1981 and the miners' strike in Britain in 1984-85; privatisation and deregulation; lower taxes; deindustrialisation; emphasising financial services instead of manufacturing; seeing the "free market" as the answer to all social problems, etc.

The response of much of the left and labour movement was capitulation. In France, Spain, and Italy, this often took the form of Eurocommunism, i.e., Communists explicitly renouncing Leninism in favour of support to bourgeois democracy. In the English-speaking world, one reflection of this was the popular book by Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985) that explicitly renounced Marxism in favour of something called "radical democracy". For the labour movement, it meant prostration to the bourgeois state, a precipitous decline in strikes and other resistance, and the decimation of the unions. Eric Hobsbawm (1978) famously described this in 1978 as "the forward march of Labour halted".[1]

By the end of the 1980s, the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc countries faced deep economic and political crises in the face of the pressure of world imperialism and decades of the demoralisation of the working class; through a series of counterrevolutions, capitalism was restored in East Europe and the Soviet Union, a tremendous defeat for the international working class. By 1991, the global balance of class forces had shifted to the side of imperialism, against the working class and oppressed throughout the world. Instead of the conflict between two social systems, the post-Soviet world was defined by exceptional stability and the hegemony of United States imperialism. This gave imperialism a renewed lease on life. Politically this was reflected in the creation of an unchallenged liberal world order that seemed to promise a new vista of world peace, stability, and democracy. Bourgeois ideologues rushed to proclaim American liberal democracy as the apex of civilisation that each country should emulate, most famously encapsulated in Francis Fukuyama's argument (1989) that counterrevolution heralded the "end of history". The

1 According to one study, Hobsbawm himself became known as "Neil Kinnock's Favourite Marxist" and his "interventions can be seen as preparing the ground for Tony Blair, New Labour, and Anthony Giddens, the supposedly theoretical and academic inspiration for the much heralded 'third way'," (Pimlott 2005: 177).

overwhelming power of US imperialism over its rivals, along with the opening of huge parts of the world to capitalist investment, gave imperialism a new vitality and fuelled a massive growth in international trade, moving industrial production to the neo-colonial world ("offshoring"), and increased international capitalist circulation, while avoiding another inter-imperialist war. This became known as ***globalisation***, and is reflected in the Maastricht Treaty (1993), North American Free Trade Agreement (1994) and the World Trade Organisation (1995).

Counterrevolution, globalisation and the left

Post-Soviet globalisation posed new challenges, disorientating many Marxists. Living standards increased for much of the global south, but this was coupled to further subjugation to imperialism. For example, in Brazil, the per capita GDP increased from US$3,085 in 1990 to $13,200 in 2011 and the adult literacy rate increased from 75 per cent in 1980 to 93 per cent in 2017, while foreign direct investment rose from less than US$ 1 billion in 1990 to more than $100 billion in 2011 (including massive privatisation of industry).[2] Besides the disaster of counterrevolution itself, the increase of productive forces and the concomitant rise in international stability ***seemed*** to contradict Lenin's argument (most forcefully made in *Imperialism* [1916]) that the epoch of imperialism was the last stage of capitalism marked by imperialist war and the parasitism of capitalism. In fact, only Marxist analysis could explain these developments since the counterrevolution in the Soviet Union and offer a way forward for the working class. The rejuvenation of imperialism in the wake of the counterrevolution, like the original growth of imperialism a century earlier (the time of the Second International), is temporary and augurs a period of war and revolution as intense, if not more so, than Lenin's time.

Many leftists reacted to the counterrevolution by jettisoning Marxism. Once-huge Communist parties disintegrated, such as in Italy. Many intellectuals, imbibed the "death of communism" and "the end of history" and abandoned any pretence of Marxism. The unions in general continued their decline. The leadership of the Labour Party in Britain moved even further to the right under Tony Blair (symbolised by the rewriting of Clause IV in 1995) (Riddell 1997).

The ideological reflection—and justification—of the hegemony of United States imperialism in the post-Soviet world was ***liberalism***. Marx famously wrote in 1845 that "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas", that is,

2 GDP taken from "Brazil GDP Per Capita, 1960-2023," Macrotrends.net, based on World Bank figures; Literacy information taken from "Brazil Literacy Rates, 1980-2023," Macrotrends.net, based on World Bank figures; FDI figures from "Foreign direct investment, net inflows—Brazil", World Bank website. (All websites accessed 27 September 2023.) On privatisation in Brazil, see Anuatti-Netto, et al 2003.

the ideological expression "of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance" (1970:64). In the post-Soviet world, liberalism represented the views of the imperialist bourgeoisie of the United States, and served to justify and defend the domination of US imperialism in the world. Globalisation was a product of US imperialist hegemony, and liberalism was an ideological cover for the interests of US imperialism.

The liberal view that the world had entered into a period of peaceful and stable capitalist development under globalisation was not just for State Department philosophers like Fukuyama, but also permeated the left. Despite its name, the antiglobalisation movement did not challenge the basic liberal premises but criticised globalisation for not living up to these liberal ideals. That is to say, the antiglobalisation movement never went beyond asking imperialism to change its priorities. Of course, the United States imperialists were never going to do this, and responded with bloody repression—often murderous repression, such as in Genova in 2001. But if some riots inconvenienced the imperialists, the antiglobalisation movement never threatened United States imperialist hegemony. The movement was fundamentally loyal to the bourgeois status quo, and provided no alternative to the offensive mounted by imperialist finance capital in the 1990s and early 2000s. In Anglophone imperialist countries globalisation included massive deindustrialisation as capitalists moved manufacturing to neo-colonial countries; for example, between 1994 and 2010, more than 600,000 manufacturing jobs in the United States were lost, especially in automobile and electronic manufacturing (Scott 2011:2). The response of much of the leadership of the unions was to push protectionism, that is, pit workers in the United States against their class brothers and sisters in Mexico. Many leftists in the United States denounced the chauvinism of the labour bureaucracy and reactionary politicians, but did not offer a Marxist programme to defend jobs and working conditions, which would have been in the interests of workers in the imperialist countries ***and*** the third world. In time, the left and labour movements abandoned opposition to free-trade such as NAFTA and the European Union, which helped pushed millions of workers to support demagogues such as Donald Trump, Marie LePen, and Giorgia Meloni.

Canadian journalist Naomi Klein's *No Logo* (2000) was a seminal text of the antiglobalisation movement. Klein criticised the dominant "manic renditions of globalization", counterposing the reality of "another kind of global village, where the economic divide is widening and cultural choices narrowing", and "where some multinationals, far from levelling the global playing field with jobs and technology for all, are in the process of mining the planet's poorest back country for unimaginable profits" (Klein 200: 15). Certainly, the domination of United States imperialism in the post-Soviet world meant an almost infinite list of barbarism. But neither openly bourgeois liberals like Klein nor more radical antiglobalisation activists and intellectuals, including those who saw themselves as Marxists, went beyond offering

a more militant, radical version of liberalism, or to borrow Marx's wording, the ideas of bourgeois domination.

During the First World War, Lenin observed how some Marxists became opportunist during the long period of slow, peaceful, development of capitalism in the late 1800s and early 1900s. When the First World War broke out these opportunists supported their "own" ruling classes in this inter-imperialist war, betraying the international working class. For Lenin, the task of real, revolutionary Marxists, was to break from such opportunist perversion of Marxism. In "The War and Russian Social-Democracy" (1914), Lenin wrote:

> The opportunists have long been preparing the ground for this collapse by denying the socialist revolution by substituting bourgeois reformism in its stead; by rejecting the class struggle with its inevitable conversion at certain moments into civil war, and by preaching class collaboration…. The aims of socialism at the present time cannot be fulfilled, and real international unity of the workers cannot be achieved, without a decisive break with opportunism, and without the explaining its inevitable fiasco to the masses (1964:31-32).

Lenin directed much of his attacks on figures like Karl Kautsky, whom he called centrists because they used Marxist rhetoric to forge unity with the openly pro-capitalist betrayers of socialism.

The post-Soviet period was marked, not by inter-imperialist war, but by a long period of relative world peace, under the aegis of United States imperialism. In the English-speaking imperialist countries, the antiglobalisation movement was the most important opposition movement, fuelled by horror at inequality and exploitation in the post-Soviet world. This sentiment could have been a point of departure for a real push back against the devastation of the working class in the west and the increased economic and political oppression of the global south, but this would have required breaking with the movement's bourgeois liberal framework: it is impossible to eliminate poverty, racism, exploitation, etc., created by the liberal world order while sharing the politics of the same liberal order. The task of the hour for Marxists was splitting the antiglobalisation movement along class lines.

Marxists in the English-speaking world did not do this. While recognising that the antiglobalisation movement was not Marxist, most sought to provide a bridge between it and genuine revolutionary Marxism. They confined themselves to being left-wing critics of the antiglobalisation movement, trying to push it from the left, instead of breaking left-wing activists from its pro-capitalist liberal politics—the same bourgeois liberal framework that was responsible for the very social ills they were protesting.

This is clear, for example in *An Anti-Capitalist Manifesto* (2003), written by Alex Callinicos, a British professor and one of the best-known Marxists in the English-

speaking world, and a leader in the British Socialist Workers Party, at the time perhaps the largest far-left organisation in Britain. In this pamphlet, Callinicos writes, "the movement is best described as anti-capitalist" and "an anti-systemic movement" (Callinicos 2003: 14-15). For Callinicos, the task of Marxists facing the anti-globalisation movements in the late 1990s and early 2000s was to champion the movement while offering left-wing advice. This is most evident in the last chapter of his manifesto, "Imagining Other Worlds". He lays out his vision of "anti-capitalism", which he argues, should be based on "the requirements of (at least) justice, efficiency, democracy, and sustainability" (Callinicos 2003: 107). To help us imagine another world, Callinicos includes what he calls "A Transitional Programme" that includes demands such as "the immediate cancellation of Third World debt"; "restoration of capital controls"; "defence of public services and renationalization of privatized industry"; "progressive taxation to finance public services and redistribute wealth and income"; "abolition of immigration controls and extension of citizenship rights"; "a programme to forestall environmental catastrophe"; and "defence of civil liberties" (Callinicos 2003: 132-39). He asserts that these demands "go against the logic of capital" and "the tendency of these demands is to undermine the logic of capital…. In other words, while not necessarily formulated for explicitly anti-capitalist reasons, these demands have an implicitly anti-capitalist dynamic" (Callinicos 2003: 140).

The point twenty years on is not whether these are good or bad demands. Rather, for Callinicos the purpose of these demands is to push the antiglobalisation movement further to the left, to make it ***really*** uphold liberal values. Some of Callinicos' demands would, in fact, go beyond what is possible under capitalism, such as the "dissolution of the military-industrial complex". In Marxist terms, Callinicos was trying to fashion the ideology of the ruling class against the ruling class itself, that is, wield the ruling class's tool for domination—liberalism—as a force of liberation. Even the most left-wing slogan possible would serve to give a more left colouration to the fundamental liberalism of the antiglobalisation movement, i.e., capitulate to US imperialism. As a Marxist, however, Callinicos should do more than offer advice on how to make liberalism more left-wing. His "Anti-Capitalist Manifesto" lays out a vision in which the role of Marxists is to intervene into the antiglobalisation movement, counsel it to raise a series of demands that supposedly implicitly challenge capitalism, and then this will result in a struggle for a non-capitalist world. Somehow this would transform the liberal antiglobalisation movement (or at least some of it) into Marxists; instead, it converted the Marxists like Callinicos into liberals. Capitulation to liberalism meant capitulation to the imperialist United States bourgeoisie.

In 2013, Callincos wrote an article, "Is Leninism finished?" that, despite its formal defence of Lenin, in fact opposed what Lenin fought for. The article notes, "we have seen since the Seattle protests of November 1999 waves of political

radicalisation directed at neoliberalism and sometimes at capitalism itself" and mentions the Arab Spring, the *Indignados* movement in Spain and the Occupy movement in the United States. He acknowledges that these movements "have not led to or been sustained by workers' struggles that have reached a similar level of generalisation or intensity." True enough, but the conclusion that Callinicos draws was that with enough advice from Marxists, with enough emphasis on the working class, these movements could have been turned into anticapitalist movements. Just like the antiglobalisation movement, these movements were motivated by genuine anger at the state of the world, but were completely within the framework of bourgeois liberalism. The task of Marxists was to try to ***break*** activists from liberalism to a revolutionary Marxist framework; Callinicos sought to build a bridge between Marxism and liberalism, which is, in fact, a dead-end because it guarantees that activists will not go beyond capitalist politics.

This is an abdication of the responsibility of Marxists. But Callinicos is not unique. Take for example David Harvey, a Marxist geographer in New York. In 2005, he published *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* that, after laying out the negative effects of the rise of neoliberalism, notes the rise of anti-neoliberal oppositional movements, from environmentalists, anarchists, religious sects, peasant movements in Latin America, centre-left coalitions, including the Workers Party in Brazil and the Congress Party in India (Harvey 2005: 186). All these movements, Harvey writes, seek to reverse certain aspects of neo-liberalism. He asserts:

> Objectives of this sort cannot be realized without challenging the fundamental power bases upon which neoliberalism has been built and to which the processes of neoliberalization have been so lavishly contributed. This means not only reversing the withdrawals of the state from social provision but also confronting the overwhelming powers of finance capital… (Harvey 2005: 187).

Harvey looks at how "neoliberalization has spawned a swath of oppositional movements both within and without its compass," and emphasises how they "are fomenting quite different lines of social and political struggle" compared to "typical social democratic politics," particularly from "the worker-based movements that dominated before 1980" (Harvey 2005: 199). Harvey insists on what he describes as "the crucial role played by class struggle in either checking or restoring elite class power" and advocates that resistance to neoliberalism be to "respond to it in class terms" (Harvey 2005: 201-2). Harvey argues against "some simple conception of class to which we can appeal as the primary (let alone exclusive) agent of historical transformation" as the "proletarian field of utopian Marxian fantasy" (Harvey 2005: 202). He argues for "a resurgence of mass movements voicing egalitarian political demands and seeking economic justice, fair trade, and greater economic security" (Harvey 2005: 203-204). Callinicos, and Harvey all see the role of Marxists as lending the anti-neoliberal, antiglobalisation, and other ***liberal*** movements a left character.

That is, they seek to make liberalism more left-wing and infuse it with Marxist rhetoric. Unlike Callinicos, Harvey has followed his argument to it logical conclusion and stated (Harvey 2019) that "a revolutionary overthrow of this capitalist economic system is not anything that's conceivable at the present time. It will not happen, and it cannot happen, and we have to make sure that it does not happen." Instead, he asserted: "We have to actually spend some time propping it ["the capitalist economic system"] up, trying to reorganize it, and maybe shift it around very slowly and over time to a different configuration." By historical analogy, Harvey, the open reformist, is an Eduard Bernstein, while Callinicos, who has not officially renounced revolution, is a modern-day Kautsky.

The breakdown of the post-Soviet world and the weakness of US imperialist hegemony

The weaknesses of United States imperialism have become more obvious over the last decade. The very strength of United States-led neoliberalism and globalisation has undermined US imperialism hegemony itself. As US capitalism becomes more parasitical, and more hollowed out, the contradiction between US hegemony and its reduced economic power becomes less and less sustainable. In the 1990s the undisputed power of the United States helped suppress inter-imperialist rivalries, and built up the productive forces of the world, contributing to increased world trade, and increasing industrialisation and urbanisation in large parts of Asia and Latin America, raising living standards in a real, if uneven, way. Now the imperialists, to maintain their dominance, are compelled to try to rollback these advances in productive forces. This highlights that the further development of the world's productive forces runs against the class interests of the American bourgeoisie, the very class that created globalisation in the first place. In other words, we are seeing a confirmation of Lenin's view of the parasitical, reactionary nature of imperialism. As we will see, just as the creation of the liberal world order disorientated many leftists, its breakdown confuses much of the left.

The final Marxist this paper examines is Radhika Desai, who teaches politics at the University of Manitoba and is the director of the Geopolitical Economy Research Group; she recently published *Capitalism, Coronavirus and War: A Geopolitical Economy* (2023). On its face, this is very left-wing book. For example, it contains trenchant criticisms of social democracy. She observes, "In the neoliberal era, the historic parties of the working class went beyond deradicalisation to outright acceptance of neoliberalism" (Desai 2023: 221) and denounces "social democratic accommodation with the neoliberal settlement" (*Ibid.* 222). Yet for all her criticisms of social democracy, Desai evinces an objectivism that reflects a capitulation to social democracy.

Desai focuses heavily on neoliberalism, writing: "the contradictions of prolonging capitalism's life through neoliberalism lie at the heart of the capitalist world's diminishing capabilities, whether in pandemic or war" (*Ibid.* 4) Desai, more so than Harvey and Callinicos, identifies capitalism per se with neo-liberalism. For example, she asserts:

> [N]eoliberal financialised capitalism, best exampled by its leading countries, the United States and the United Kingdom, is the only form in which capitalism—a society in which the state ensures that the investment prerogative remains in the hands [of] capital, which today means monopoly and financialised capitalism—can exist today. The more productively oriented capitalism of the sort that still lingers in countries like Germany and Japan, had always been in danger of serving as a stepping stone to socialism. (Desai 2023: 5)

Several pages later, she states again: "neoliberal capitalism is nothing more or less than the only form in which capitalism can survive today. The alternative of a reformed 'socialistic' capitalism would put it back on the ramp to socialism" (Desai 2023: 16).

There are several objections to this argument. First, and most obviously, it is factually wrong. Since the 1970s the bourgeoisies in the United States and Britain have preferred neoliberalism, but this was not always the case (as Harvey shows in his book), and one can imagine a situation that mass working-class struggle or geopolitical relations or conflicts propels the English-speaking imperialist bourgeoisies to increase state intervention into the economy. More importantly, her references to "the stepping stone" or "the ramp" to socialism, suggest that for Desai, if the bourgeoisie were forced to reverse neoliberal policies—say, rebuild a strong social welfare state such as existed in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s—then this would be a step towards socialism. It sets up a counterposition in which the alternatives are not the rule of the proletariat or the rule of the bourgeoisie, but ***neoliberalism*** or ***socialism***. It would mean that any policy or government that opposes neoliberalism ***objectively*** leads to socialism. If this is the case, then despite all the harsh criticisms Desai has for social democracy, the most that can be said against social democracy is that it is dragging its feet in the movement towards socialism. This is counterposed to Lenin's understanding that a section of the leadership of the working class—the leadership of the Second International in Lenin's times—had betrayed the international proletariat and become the agents of the imperialist bourgeoise. Rather than pointing out the need for workers to ***split*** from liberalism, Desai ***conciliates*** liberalism, no less than Kautsky conciliated Bernstein.

In 2021 Desai and the Geopolitical Economy Research Group established The International Manifesto Group which published a manifesto, "Through Pluripolarity to Socialism". This Manifesto is even clearer in this objectivism. Surveying the

world at large, it sketches out a vision of the dynamics of the world situation leading to a weakened US imperialism. This in turn leads to socialism:

> Though neoliberalism reigned, it failed. It could not resume dynamic capitalist growth even in imperialist economies…. Revising economies and addressing the ecological emergency and the pandemic will require industrial policy, state investment, social redistribution, environmental planning and public health infrastructure on a scale comparable [!] to socialism and require ending capitalists' control over the state and policy. (International Manifesto Group 2021: 9)

The Manifesto emphasises the weakening of the hegemony of United States imperialism on a broader geopolitical level and asserts that this situation has created global "multipolarity or what Hugo Chávez more accurately called pluripolarity, referring to the multipolarity of poles of power and the variety of their national capitalisms and socialisms" (International Manifesto Group 2021: 3-4). According to the Manifesto, this opened the road to socialism internationally:

> Today a number of peoples are already building socialism, but most are left paying the price of keeping declining and extortionate capital in control. It is high time all working people began building socialism by forming themselves into a 'class for itself', overthrowing the capitalist class and taking political power…. The key is seizing control over the state from capital. The role of the public power, the state, is essential and distinctive and control over it should be in the hands of working people. Though capital may rule over considerable private enterprise, particularly during the early socialist stages, a socialist state must progressively subject all production to social ends through planning for the general interest. Whether to socialise given means of production will be contextual and often pragmatic decision. (International Manifesto Group 2021: 17-18)

Instead of emphasising the necessity of workers' revolution, this passage depicts the development of socialism as an objective, gradual process, in which opposition to neoliberalism is a "stepping stone to socialism". Desai and the Manifesto's "geopolitical" perspective means that any country that resists the domination of the United States is by definition also moving in the direction of socialism, or at least "comparable" to socialism. If all roads lead to socialism, this means that there is no need for Marxists to split with opportunists, which means that Lenin was wrong on the need for a vanguard party.

This is underscored in the Manifesto's conclusion that: "We must oppose the US-sponsored imperialist New Cold War and build an ambitious multilateral governance enabling all countries to develop, create economic, gender, racial and religious equality, and address shared challenges through economic, political, financial, scientific and cultural cooperation for mutual benefit" (International Manifesto Group 2021: 19). The Manifesto adds, "The original ideals of the United Nations

charter…are excellent foundations for further constructing alternatives to institutions of US and Western dominance." (International Manifesto Group 2021: 20). The United Nations Charter is the quintessential liberal document, since it asserts that it is possible for nations to "practice tolerance and live in peace with one another as good neighbours" and "maintain international peace and security" while imperialism dominates the world. The United States imperialists set up the United Nations to enshrine their power after the Second World War; it brings to mind Lenin's description of the League of Nations in 1920 as an "alliance of robbers, each trying to snatch something from each other" except the UN includes the neocolonial victims of imperialism, too.

Seeing middle-income countries (such as Brazil) as a counterbalance to United States imperialism is based on the wrong view that they have somehow transcended the domination of the world economy by the imperialist powers. Even though the role of the middle-income countries in the world economy has increased they are still subordinated to international finance capitalism, at bottom, United States imperialism. Desai credits Hugo Chávez with coming up the with the concept of "pluripolarity", but the situation of Venezuela in the last decade—the collapse of much of the economy in the face of unrelenting imperialist hostility—underlines that the US imperialists still dominate the world. A more "normal" country like Brazil, which is not currently subject to coup attempts or sanctions, remains dependent on the imperialist market which is controlled by the United States bourgeoisie.

Conclusion

Instead of peace, the breakdown of US hegemony has set the stage for new wars of unimaginable brutality. For the masses of the "Global South", what is on offer is further immiseration. For the working class and oppressed in the imperialist countries, a capitalist future promises growing attacks on living standards as the balance maintained by cheap credit, monopoly profits, and speculative bubbles gives way. In Africa, Asia, and Latin America, globalisation has created an urban, literate, and powerful working class, and in the imperialist centres the working class is showing signs of discontent. The fundamental contradiction in the world situation is the decay of world imperialism, the last stage of capitalism, and the interests of the international working class. Finally, we are now seeing the breakdown of the post-Soviet hegemony of United States imperialism, which is making the world much more unstable. This underlines the importance of Marxists to understand—and change—the contemporary world. Unfortunately, Marxists in the Anglophone world, instead of using Marxism as a tool to fight against capitalism, are turning it into a liberal tool. What is needed is a return to revolutionary Marxism, based on the understanding of the need to split with liberalism, not to capitulate or conciliate it.

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HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTIONS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS AND GEOPOLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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Abstract. Are the ''naming and shaming'' activities of Human Rights Organizations (HROs) robust to geopolitical factors? While Murdie and Peksen (2014) provide empirical evidence that such HRO activities increase the likelihood of humanitarian intervention, the existing literature on geopolitics indicates a variable effect, which can be associated with both positive and negative directions regarding intervention onset, although the geopolitical effect remains consistent and significant. Hence, I formulate a hypothesis proposing a correlation between geopolitics and the initiation of interventions. I further suggest that this link could influence the empirical evidence, indicating that HRO activities have a statistically significant impact on the probability of intervention onset, potentially introducing a confounding factor. Using the replication data from Murdie and Peksen (2014) covering the period from 1990 to 2005, however, I find that even when accounting for a geopolitical factor (i.e., being a United States ally), the substantial positive influence of HRO activities on the intervention onset remains empirically robust.

Keywords: Humanitarian Interventions, Human Rights Organizations (HROs), Geopolitical Factors

> "Geopolitics is about broad impersonal forces that constrain nations and human beings and compel them to act in certain ways."
>
> — George Friedman (2009: 12)

Introduction

ARE THE CERTAIN ACTIVITIES (I.E., NAMING AND SHAMING) OF HUMAN rights Organizations (HROs) robust to geopolitical factors? This is the research question of this paper. Murdie and Peksen (2014) argue and find empirical evidence that the engagement of HROs in activities that involve naming and shaming increases the chances of humanitarian interventions. Although they include

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certain political and economic factors, like regime type and state capacity, in their empirical models, they do not account for geopolitical factors. This has been the central motivation behind my research. Thus, I replicate the empirical research conducted by Murdie and Peksen (2014) to assess the robustness of the significant impact of HROs by empirically controlling for geopolitical considerations.

As discussed later, the existing literature indicates that geopolitics plays a crucial role in the context of decisions on humanitarian intervention. However, its influence is not consistently uniform and can take on various forms. While it consistently factors in the likelihood of humanitarian interventions, the impact of these geopolitical factors can vary, either positively or negatively, influencing whether interventions become more or less likely. Therefore, I develop a hypothesis suggesting a correlation between geopolitics and intervention onset. I estimate that this correlation may introduce complexity to the statistical finding that HRO activities have a significant impact on the likelihood of interventions, potentially confounding the results.

The data obtained from Murdie and Peksen (2014) pertains to the period spanning from 1990 to 2005, a period in which the United States held a prevalent position as the world's hegemonic power (Layne and Schwarz, 1993; Ikenberry, 1998). Consequently, I argue that a country's alignment as a United States ally during this specific timeframe should be considered as holding greater geopolitical significance in comparison to being an ally with any other country. As a result, I devise a metric to assess whether the countries subject to intervention were in an alliance with the United States and employ this as a geopolitical measure.

Between 1990 and 2005, there were, on average, nearly 16 military interventions conducted annually, driven by humanitarian objectives (Pickering and Kisangani, 2009: 597). My findings indicate that having an alliance with the United States raises the likelihood of armed humanitarian missions. This implies that countries aligned with the United States are more prone to being subjected to humanitarian interventions based on the observations between from 1990 to 2005. Nonetheless, even after factoring in this crucial geopolitical factor, the notable positive influence of HRO activities on the initiation of interventions remains robust.

The remainder of the paper proceeds with a concise overview of the prior research concerning the explanations for the decisions of third parties to engage in humanitarian interventions. Subsequently, I conduct a comparison between the influence of HROs and geopolitical factors on the intervention onset, leading to the formulation of a hypothesis. Next, I outline the replicated data employed to assess this hypothesis and present the empirical results, which demonstrate

whether the findings through rare-events logistic regression analysis hold significance. Finally, the paper presents a concluding section.

What Explains Humanitarian Intervention

A wide array of political and economic factors have been suggested as potential explanators of the likelihood of humanitarian interventions. More specifically, current research reveals differing viewpoints on whether the degree of the ongoing crisis or the strategic and economic importance of the crisis location carries greater weight in determining the occurrence of intervention. For example, De Jonge Oudraat (1996), Fortna (2004: 288), Doyle and Sambanis (2006: 4), Ruggeri et al. (2018) reveal that interventions tend to be more frequent in the most severe and violent situations, whereas Gilligan and Stedman (2003: 51-52) find that peacekeeping operations exhibit a preference for specific global regions, notably Europe and the Western Hemisphere. Gilligan and Stedman's (2003) findings nonetheless also indicate that these operations are still motivated by humanitarian and security considerations.

Moreover, there are many scholars who demonstrate that peacekeeping missions are more likely to be sent to conflicts where the national interests of the major powers (i.e., typically P-5 members) of the Security Council are involved (Fortna, 2008; Andersson, 2000; Gibbs, 1997). This is because, as Mills and McNamee (2009: 59) observe, the UN often prioritizes the political will of its most influential members and its own bureaucratic interests over those of the conflict parties. For example, Fortna (2008) reveals that peacekeeping interventions, whether under the UN or not, are rare in conflicts situated within or neighbouring the territories of P-5 members. She attributes this trend to the notion that major powers are highly protective of their sovereignty and of immediate areas of influence. As they are highly sensitive to sovereignty concerns, they typically choose to keep a certain distance from the UN. However, Beardsley and Schmidt (2012) discover that although the alignment of the national interests of P-5 members does have an impact on the UN's response to humanitarian crises, the severity of these plays a more crucial role in predicting intervention.

Another popular determinant of intervention is considered to be the "CNN effect," that is, media attention to humanitarian crises is what drives where and when the UN takes action to intervene (Jakobsen, 1996: 206). Scholars of the "CNN effect" overall argue that media coverage can influence government policies, especially when the media portrays a situation in a manner that evokes public sympathy (i.e., media coverage becomes influential when linked to public opinion). This influence can further expedite the foreign policy-making

process and shape policy conduct regarding humanitarian intervention (Gilboa, 2005: 336-337). While there are coherent theoretical arguments suggesting that media coverage can drive interventions, the empirical evidence found in the literature is not strong; such influence is not transformative (Robinson, 2011: 5). This may be possible because media companies often have partisan leanings, are influenced by elites, and are driven by the pursuit of profits (Entman, 2004: 156).

Earlier studies, such as those by Gilboa (2005), Jakobsen (2000), and Robinson (2000), indicate a limited impact of news coverage of humanitarian crises on interventions. For instance, Robinson's (2000) policy–media interaction model demonstrates that policymakers tend to resist media influence when there is policy certainty. Precisely, news coverage is unlikely to affect policy outcomes when a clear policy direction is in place. More recent research, such as that by Doucet (2018) and Murdie and Peksen (2014), presents findings that suggest we cannot discount the media effect, although it may be more instrumental than independent. For example, Doucet (2018) demonstrates how the CNN Effect continues to hold influence over foreign policy, although its impact varies significantly depending on the broader strategic context of different administrations in power. On the other hand, Murdie and Peksen (2014) reveal that an external factor like the influence of human rights organizations is contingent on the level of media exposure.

The Impact of Human Rights Organizations vs. Geopolitical Considerations on Humanitarian Interventions

The majority of prior literature on the factors influencing intervention decisions often adopts a state-centric perspective, with a primary emphasis on geopolitical and economic considerations. Previous discussions predominantly overlook the significant role that nonstate actors can play in shaping foreign policy decisions on humanitarian intervention. This is the primary motivation of Murdie and Peksen (2014: 215), who emphasize the role of non-state actors, particularly human rights organizations, in humanitarian intervention decisions. While the literature on geopolitical and economic considerations is abundant, there is also a substantial body of literature on human rights organizations. In fact, the current literature on human rights organizations is consistent that these organizations disseminate information about human rights conditions to the international community, with a particular focus on periods of intense conflict and human rights crises (Meernik et al., 2012: 238; Murdie and Davis, 2012; Keck and Sikkink, 1998). By doing so, they attract the attention of both intergovernmental

organizations (IGOs) and third-party states using a strategy commonly quoted as "naming and shaming" or "shaming and blaming" (Park et al., 2021: 169).

While it is evident that HROs inspire public opinion and encourage action in support of vulnerable populations, nuanced arguments exist regarding their effectiveness in shaping foreign policy decisions on intervention. For example, realists often perceive HROs as tools of the states, arguing that the information they generate should only have rhetorical influence on foreign policy choices as soon as the essential national security, political and economic considerations are factored in (Mearsheimer, 1994; Manan, 2017: 176-179). In contrast, with a specific emphasis on information produced by HROs, Murdie and Peksen (2014) argue that HROs should influence decisions on humanitarian intervention. Such an argument is fundamentally sourced in the credibility of HROs and the public confidence in them.

HROs are perceived as highly credible sources in a world filled with misinformation. Reports citing HROs are more likely to be believed, leading to a change in public and elite opinion and pressure for action on behalf of oppressed populations (Wong, 2012: 86-88). This is because they face genuine limitations when it comes to exaggeration, as they fundamentally rely on maintaining credibility to attract supporters (Gourevitch and Lake, 2012: 3-5). People tend to have more confidence in HROs and related organizations than in television or government. The World Values Survey results demonstrate that a substantial percentage, significantly higher than those who trust TV and government, have a high level of trust in "charitable or humanitarian organizations," similar to HROs globally. This trust can influence public opinion and action (Murdie and Peksen, 2014: 218). In fact, the empirical evidence by Ausderan (2014) and Davis et al. (2012) suggests that HRO shaming can lead to shifts in public perception of human rights.

These arguments collectively undergird the possible influence of HRO information on shaping decisions related to intervention. Additionally, Murdie and Peksen (2014) provide statistical empirical evidence that HRO shaming increases the likelihood of humanitarian intervention, impacting both IGO-led missions and interventions by third-party states. While they do incorporate some political and economic factors, such as regime type and state capacity, into their empirical model, I argue that their model could be extended to include geopolitical factors. Considering that many existing explanations for intervention decisions predominantly emphasize geopolitical factors, the omission of such factors in their model could have a substantial impact. I deduce that if measures of geopolitical factors were included in their empirical model, their findings regarding the significant impact of non-state actors (i.e., HROs) on intervention may lose their robustness.

Geopolitics, according to scholars, Cohen (2015: 16) and Flint (2016: 36), refers to the study of the interaction between geographical contexts and political processes. It investigates the dynamic relationship between these elements, where each has an impact on and is influenced by the other. Moreover, it is concerned with exploring the results of this interplay, with a particular emphasis on the competition for dominance over globally significant geographical regions and the strategic use of these regions to gain political advantages. In the context of humanitarian issues and intervention, scholars typically employ geopolitical relational factors when analysing decisions related to humanitarian intervention. These factors commonly involve geopolitical affinity versus hostility (Terman and Byun, 2022; Zarpli and Zengin, 2022; Terman and Voeten, 2018) and geographical proximity versus distance (Ruggeri et al., 2018; Rost and Greig, 2011). While geopolitical affinity refers to a situation in which two or more countries share common interests, values, or alliances, geographical proximity pertains to the spatial closeness of countries or regions to each other. Many scholars, including Mullenbach and Matthews (2008), Fordham (2008), and Mullenbach (2005), use military alliances and assistance, such as weapons and aid, as proxy measures for geopolitical affinity.

While these variables almost always hold explanatory power concerning the probability of humanitarian interventions, the direction of their effects varies. Not all scholars, particularly with regard to geopolitical affinity, find evidence supporting the same direction. This suggests that the decision to intervene may be influenced by geopolitical factors in various ways. Before delving into such evidence and its underlying theoretical arguments, I need to clarify the United States bias that this paper carries. This bias is due to the time frame of the data used, which is drawn from Murdie and Peksen (2014). The replication data used in this paper covers the time period from 1990 to 2005, a period during which the United States was commonly regarded as the world's hegemon 'without an enemy,' a consensus held by many international relations (IR) scholars, although it has faced significant challenges in recent times (Layne and Schwarz, 1993; Ikenberry, 1998; Choi, 2013: 134; Yildiz, 2023). In accordance with prior literature, I employ the formation of military alliances as a proxy measure for a geopolitical factor. Previously scholars (Terman and Byun, 2022: 394; Terman and Voeten, 2018: 11-12; Rost and Greig, 2011: 176-177; Fordham, 2008: 744; Mullenbach, 2005: 542) measured geopolitical importance by examining military alliances, generally by determining whether a country is aligned with major global powers, typically the P-5 members (i.e., China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) of the UN Security Council. However, given the specific time frame considered in this research, it becomes evident that the United States held overwhelming influence on a global scale (Cafruny and Ryner, 2007: 1). Therefore, I argue that a country's status as a United States ally (between

1990-2005) should be seen as carrying greater geopolitical significance compared to being an ally with any other country.

Terman and Byun (2022) and Terman and Voeten (2018) both delve into the impact of geopolitics and military alliances on state behaviour in relation to the international human rights regime. The former provides insights into the impact of geopolitical factors, shedding light on different politicization patterns across various human rights issues. The authors observe that certain human rights matter, including free expression, physical integrity, and migration, are often weaponized by states to disparage their geopolitical adversaries. Conversely, issues considered less contentious, such as education, women's rights, and trafficking, tend to be enforced more frequently among geopolitical friends and allies. The latter on the other hand, addresses the influence of military alliances. The authors argue that states sharing a formal military alliance tend to be more lenient toward each other. However, they find mixed support for this hypothesis, with the significance of the alliance only emerging when ideological convergence is excluded from the model. This suggests that military alliances can be multifaceted. The nature of the alliance, the specific goals, the historical context, and the extent of dependence on the alliance partner can be more crucial. This complexity can make it difficult to generalize the impact of military alliances on state behaviour.

Zarpli and Zengin (2022) and Rost and Greig (2011) offer complementary insights into the role of geopolitical factors in shaping international responses to specific humanitarian issues. Zarpli and Zengin focus on human rights violations in China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), highlighting the importance of geopolitical affinity in influencing how governments respond. In contrast, Rost and Greig (2011) provide a broader perspective on peacekeeping missions and state behaviour, emphasizing how states' strategic interests, including military alliances and historical ties, shape their deployment of peacekeepers. More specifically, Zarpli and Zengin demonstrate that geopolitical affinity is a robust predictor of how governments respond to China's actions. Governments tend to respond more positively to China if they share geopolitical interests. On the other hand, Rost and Greig (2011) show that when states act independently, they have more flexibility to consider their own interests and strategic goals. They are more likely to deploy peacekeepers to regions where they have former colonies, military alliances, trade partnerships, or ethnic ties. Mullenbach and Matthews (2008) share a similar focus with Rost and Greig (2011) by also revealing how ideological and ethnic linkages significantly influence intervention decisions. These insights collectively emphasize the role of geopolitical factors, shared interests, and historical connections in shaping state behaviour.

Choi (2013) focuses on the motivations behind U.S. humanitarian military interventions and examines whether national interests, including alliance relationships or economic considerations, are the primary drivers behind these decisions. His empirical findings challenge the realist notion, suggesting that these interventions are primarily motivated by a genuine desire to save lives and protect people facing starvation and death due to political violence in other sovereign states, rather than geopolitical interests. This perspective aligns with the liberal view that U.S. leaders are more likely to respond to humanitarian crises and engage in military interventions when they feel a moral obligation to help, especially with the support of the international human rights community. In contrast, Fordham (2008) demonstrates the significant impact of alliance commitments and the actions of rival states on the likelihood of intervention decisions. He highlights the policymakers' emphasis on national security considerations, and the evidence presented supports the importance of these security concerns, with geopolitical allies and adversaries playing a pivotal role. Mullenbach (2005) shares findings that align with Fordham (2008), suggesting that the past and current behaviour of major global and regional powers, along with their influence on global and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), such as the permanent members of the UN Security Council, strongly predict future peacekeeping missions. Additionally, Mullenbach (2005) reveals that the establishment of a third-party peacekeeping mission is significantly less likely if the target state has a military alliance with a major global or regional power.Top of Form

Like Mullenbach (2005), Beardsley and Schmidt (2012) also focus on the role of the United Nations (UN) in peacekeeping missions and the influence of the P-5 members of the UN Security Council on UN interventions. However, they find that while P-5 interests do shape UN behaviour, the relationship is not linear. The UN's actions remain consistent with its humanitarian and security mission, rather than being solely driven by the parochial interests of the P-5 members. Moreover, the level of UN involvement is influenced by the degree of preference overlap among P-5 members. For instance, conflicts involving direct P-5 members saw lower UN involvement during the Cold War but increased involvement after the Cold War, particularly when the U.S. became the hegemonic power. These findings align with empirical evidence from Mullenbach and Matthews (2008) suggesting that U.S. interventions, though in the context of interstate disputes, may have been more influenced by strategic and geopolitical considerations during the Cold War. Subsequently, the reduced intensity of superpower competition may have allowed the U.S. to base its intervention decisions more on nonstrategic motives, including concerns about civilian suffering and human rights abuses.

In short, in the realm of humanitarian intervention decisions, geopolitics plays a crucial role, but the direction of its influence is not always consistent and

can be multifaceted. While it consistently explains the likelihood of humanitarian interventions, the specific impact of these geopolitical factors varies. Scholars, particularly when considering geopolitical affinity, don't always find evidence supporting the same direction, indicating that geopolitical factors influence the decision to intervene in diverse ways. The prior literature on geopolitical factors affecting intervention decisions vis-à-vis non-state actors, particularly human rights organizations in this paper, yields the following testable hypothesis:

> There is an association between geopolitics (e.g., being a U.S. ally) and the decision to intervene for humanitarian purposes, and this association could potentially confound the statistical finding that HRO activities significantly affect the likelihood of interventions.

Research Design

This paper uses the replication data of Murdie and Peksen (2014), which was fully available. To extend their analysis, I also use the Formal Alliances (v4.1) dataset by Gibler (2009) to construct a measure that serves as a geopolitical factor. Here, I begin by illustrating the data from Murdie and Peksen (2014) first, and then I move on to my extension. To empirically investigate the effect of Human Rights Organizations on humanitarian interventions, the replication data consists of time-series and cross-section observations from 1990 to 2005, with the country-year as the unit of analysis. In an effort to ensure unbiased case selection, the data analysis omits Western liberal democracies, resulting in a dataset comprising 129 countries. This omission is grounded in the previous literature (e.g., Pickering, 2002: 318; Fearon and Laitin, 2003: 88) that liberal democracies are less prone to being the target of interventions due to their lower probability of encountering pressing humanitarian crises.

Dependent Variable: Armed Humanitarian Intervention

The International Military Intervention (IMI) dataset by Pickering and Kisangani (2009) is used to determine the armed humanitarian intervention variable. In this dataset, following the definition provided by Pearson and Baumann (1993: 4), armed intervention is described as the deployment of conventional military units or forces (including those from air, sea, or artillery) from one state into the territory of another state. However, to exclusively focus on measures related to humanitarian intervention, Murdie and Peksen (2014: 220) introduced a binary variable named "humanitarian intervention." This variable is defined based on criteria that encompass armed interventions aimed solely at alleviating and/or terminating existing humanitarian crises and addressing minority situations. The IMI dataset enables this

differentiation by providing data on various types of interventions, including those aimed at safeguarding minority groups and addressing humanitarian issues such as civil wars and genocides. Murdie and Peksen incorporated both aspects to create a more comprehensive measure. In summary, the constructed humanitarian intervention variable is assigned a value of 1 during the year when a humanitarian intervention commences within a country, and it is set to zero for all other years.

Explanatory Variables for Armed Humanitarian Intervention

The shaming activity of Human Rights Organizations is measured in two distinct ways to assess the impact of HROs on humanitarian interventions. These two measures include HRO shaming as both a count and an intensity, as detailed in the works of Murdie and Peksen (2014) and Murdie and Davis (2012). These metrics encompass all adverse events involving Human HROs targeting a specific state within a particular year, as documented in the Reuters Global News Service. The data's primary source is the Integrated Data for Event Analysis (IDEA) project and was made available through Virtual Research Associates (Bond et al., 2003). More specifically, the variable "HRO Shaming (count)" records the quantity of shaming events reported in the Reuters Global News Service that are aimed at a government or its representatives. Meanwhile, "HRO Shaming (intensity)" measures the overall intensity of these shaming events. The intensity is assessed using the Goldstein (1992) scale, which has been inverted, assigning greater weight to more intensely negative shaming events on the scale. Murdie and Peksen (2014) employ these two measures to explore whether the condemnatory statements made by HROs raise the likelihood of a humanitarian intervention in the targeted states.

Based on the existing literature, other variables are also taken into consideration as controls. In order to account for the impact of the overall level of human rights violations, the study incorporates the "Human Rights Abuses" variable, measured through the Political Terror Scale (PTS) as developed by Gibney et al. (2010). According to prior research findings (e.g., De Jonge Oudraat, 1996; Fortna, 2004; Doyle and Sambanis, 2006; Ruggeri et al., 2018), the anticipation is that countries with significant human rights abuses are more prone to becoming the target of armed humanitarian interventions.

To investigate news media coverage impact, two different measures are used. The first one, "Media Exposure" variable, considers the total number of media reports regarding sampled states within a given year, as sourced from Reuters Global News Service (Bell et al., 2012; Murdie and Davis, 2012). The second measure, "Negative News Media Coverage" variable, concentrates

specifically on media reports related to human rights abuses. This variable takes into account the total number of media reports in publications such as the Economist and Newsweek that feature the keywords "human rights" (Ramos et al., 2007).

Economically and militarily capable states are less likely to face interventions. This is because these states have the capacity to deter unwelcome military actions from other states and to prevent domestic unrest (Fearon and Laitin, 2003: 80-81; Pickering, 2002: 317). Therefore, the "State Capacity" variable is included, utilizing the Composite Indicator of National Capability from the Correlates of War (COW) (Singer, 1988). Furthermore, military interventions are less commonly directed toward democratic states than their nondemocratic counterparts (Pickering, 2002: 318). Thus, the "Democracy" variable is incorporated, utilizing the polity score obtained from the Polity IV dataset (Marshall and Jaggers, 2000).

States that are oil producers due to economic interests (Choi, 2013: 124-125; Fordham, 2008: 741-742), ethnically fragmented due to the pathological nature of intercommunal differences (Horowitz, 1985: 46) and experiencing civil wars because of the significant human cost and the potential spillover effects (Regan, 2000) also possess explanatory value for a higher likelihood of humanitarian interventions. Hence, in the empirical analysis, three binary variables are used to account for specific country characteristics. The "Oil Producer" variable is assigned a value of 1 when a country generates more than one-third of its export revenues from oil exports, and it's set to 0 otherwise. Similarly, the "Ethnic Fractionalization" variable ranges from 0 (indicating complete homogeneity) to 1 (indicating total heterogeneity). Lastly, the "Civil War" variable is set to 1 if a country experiences a civil war with at least 25 battle-related deaths per year, and it's designated as 0 if no such conflict occurs. Data regarding the oil and ethnic fractionalization variables are obtained from Fearon and Laitin (2003), while the civil war variable is sourced from the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset (Gleditsch et al., 2002).

In the context of severe humanitarian crises attracting more attention and consequently a higher likelihood of interventions, whether states undergoing large-scale massacres and the forced displacement of ethnic groups are also addressed. To investigate this, the binary variable, "Genocide" is incorporated, where 1 indicates the presence of genocide, and 0 signifies its absence. The empirical model sources this variable from Marshall et al.'s (2012) Political Instability Task Force dataset. The model additionally incorporates the "Economic Sanctions" variable, which is assigned a value of 1 for the years when a country faces economic coercion, and 0 for all other years. This variable is included to investigate whether the likelihood of military intervention increases, particularly in countries where economic coercion proves ineffective in addressing an ongoing

humanitarian crisis (Murdie and Peksen, 2014: 221-222). The sanctions data is sourced from Hufbauer et al. (2007). Finally, to control for unobserved conditions particular to different regions, region-specific dummy variables are also added into the model, covering Asia (used as the reference category), Latin America, Eastern Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East/North Africa.

An Extension: 'U.S. Alliance' as a Proxy Measure of Geopolitical Influence

To examine the impact of HROs on the initiation of armed humanitarian interventions, Murdie and Peksen (2014) incorporate a multitude of variables into their model, as demonstrated in the previous section. However, they do not address any critical geopolitical determinant. I firmly believe that this omission could be significant, considering the extensive literature highlighting the significance of geopolitical factors in decisions on humanitarian intervention. This serves as the primary motivation for this paper. Consequently, I am introducing a new variable to the existing model, labelled as "U.S. Alliance," to serve as a proxy measure of geopolitical influence.

In the past literature, scholars (Terman and Byun, 2022: 394; Terman and Voeten, 2018: 11-12; Rost and Greig, 2011: 176-177; Fordham, 2008: 744; Mullenbach, 2005: 542) assessed the significance of geopolitical factors by investigating military alliances. This typically involved evaluating whether a nation was aligned with major global powers. Therefore, I use the formation of military alliances as a proxy measure for assessing geopolitical importance, a measure consistent with previous research. However, I need to acknowledge a bias towards the United States, primarily stemming from the time frame of the data it relies on (1990-2005). During this period, the United States was widely accepted as the leading dominant global power, and many international relations scholars, including Layne and Schwarz (1993) and Ikenberry (1998), considered it the world's hegemon. Given the exceptional influence of the United States during 1990-2005, I expect that being an ally of the United States should have a greater geopolitical weight compared to aligning with any other country.

Accordingly, I use the Formal Alliances (v4.1) dataset developed by Gibler (2009) to construct a variable that assesses a country's status as a United States ally. This variable, denoted as "U.S. Alliance," is set to 1 when the target/intervened state is engaged in a military alliance with the United States and is coded as 0 if such an alliance does not exist. It's crucial to emphasize that, within the scope of this study, the term "military alliances" exclusively refers to what are conventionally categorized as "defense pacts," falling under Type I category in the alliances dataset.

Methodology

As Murdie and Peksen (2014) did previously, I also employ rare-events logistic regression. This method is elaborated by King and Zeng (2011: 141), where they illustrate that the estimates should be adapted to account for biases that arise in cases of small sample sizes or when observed events are infrequent. This is especially relevant when the dependent variable exhibits a substantial imbalance between 1s and 0s. In the analysis presented in this paper, the dependent variable, "humanitarian intervention," is assigned a value of 1 for the year when a humanitarian intervention commences within a country, and it is set to 0 otherwise. The occurrence of intervention initiation is exceedingly rare, comprising only approximately 1 percent of all observations, highlighting its significant rarity.

The "Past Intervention" variable is incorporated into all the models, to take into consideration the time passed since the previous humanitarian intervention in a country. This variable serves two key purposes: it allows for the adjustment of the increased likelihood of a country being targeted for a new intervention after experiencing a recent one, and it helps address the issue of temporal dependence, which often arises when working with cross-sectional time-series data (Beck et al., 1998: 1263).

Before expanding upon Murdie and Peksen's (2014) models, I assessed the Variance Inflation Factors (VIF)[*] to detect any signs of multicollinearity in relation to my extension variable, "U.S. Alliance". By doing so, I determined that no multicollinearity issues existed, which allowed for the direct incorporation of the extension variable. Lastly, all models are computed using Huber-White adjusted robust standard errors (clustered by country) to address the issue of heteroskedasticity (White, 1980).

Empirical Results

Table 1 illustrates the models that depict the impact of HRO shaming and U.S. alliance status on the initiation of humanitarian intervention. These models are defined by incorporating the counts of HRO shaming and HRO shaming intensity in separate models, while also ensuring that media exposure and negative media coverage measures are controlled for in relation to both HRO measures. This approach was taken to maintain consistency with Murdie and Peksen's (2014) models and avoid any manipulation in the specification of the models.

[*] See Marcoulides and Raykov (2019) for an evaluation of Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) in regression models.

Table 1: HRO Shaming, U.S. Alliance, and Humanitarian Interventions
Source: This table was prepared using the replication data by Murdie and Peksen (2014). Additionally, the Formal

	Model 1	*Model 2*	*Model 3*	*Model 4*
U.S. Alliance	0.864*	0.862**	1.095**	1.021**
	(0.338)	(0.283)	(0.334)	(0.287)
HRO shaming (count)	0.979**	1.322**		
	(0.280)	(0.440)		
HRO shaming (intensity)			0.463**	0.433**
			(0.070)	(0.106)
Human rights abuses	1.206*	1.918**	1.505**	1.795**
	(0.521)	(0.424)	(0.437)	(0.326)
Media exposure	0.090		0.034	
	(0.341)		(0.339)	
Negative news media coverage		-0.005		-0.036
		(0.069)		(0.100)
State capacity	-0.698*	-1.626**	-0.653*	-1.281**
	(0.319)	(0.478)	(0.303)	(0.310)
Democracy	-0.038	-0.049	-0.024	-0.028
	(0.057)	(0.065)	(0.059)	(0.069)
Ethnic fractionalization	-5.627	-1.804	-5.295	-4.747
	(6.238)	(7.545)	(7.011)	(7.447)
Ethnic fractionalization squared	6.102	0.401	6.548	5.109
	(7.134)	(9.178)	(7.704)	(8.624)
Civil war	0.399	0.142	0.080	0.012
	(0.874)	(1.230)	(0.844)	(1.210)
Oil producer	-1.110	-0.078	-0.511	0.200
	(0.811)	(0.553)	(0.655)	(0.555)
Economic sanctions	1.075	1.842	0.818	1.410
	(0.576)	(0.801)	(0.359)	(0.573)
Genocide	0.317	-0.642	0.570	-0.078
	(0.877)	(1.102)	(0.830)	(0.968)
Past intervention	-0.018	-0.001	-0.018	0.001
	(0.019)	(0.034)	(0.024)	(0.035)
Region dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	-13.064**	-22.669**	-13.017**	-18.321**
	(3.909)	(6.089)	(3.369)	(3.951)
Observations	16,712	12,186	16,712	12,186

Robust standard errors shown in parentheses are clustered by country. Regional dummies do not appear to save space. ** p<0.01, * p<0.05.

Alliances (v4.1) dataset by Gibler (2009) was utilized to construct the "U.S. Alliance" variable. The analysis was conducted using the Stata software program. All the data used in this research are accessible to the public.

I hypothesized that a correlation exists between geopolitical factors, such as having an alliance with the U.S., and the decision to engage in humanitarian interventions. Furthermore, this correlation has the potential to introduce a confounding element in the statistical results, which point to the significant impact of HRO activities on the likelihood of interventions, as found in Murdie and Peksen's (2014) main discovery. The empirical findings presented in Table 1 strongly support both of these arguments, showing that U.S. alliance status and HRO activities, especially shaming, increase the probability of armed humanitarian missions. In simpler terms, these results partially support my hypothesis, specifically the part regarding the relationship between geopolitics and the onset of humanitarian intervention. However, this does not negate the significance of HRO activities, underscoring that HROs remain influential entities, and their actions matter even when accounting for a key geopolitical factor.

One important point to note is that I had only formulated a non-directional hypothesis. While the results suggest a positive correlation between U.S. alliance and the initiation of interventions, signifying that countries with a defence alliance with the U.S. are more likely to be the target of humanitarian interventions, according to the existing literature, this relationship could work in both directions. My findings align with Choi's (2013) research, which explores the motivations behind humanitarian military interventions and investigates whether national interests, including formal alliance relationships, deter these decisions. He finds that they do not, therefore our empirical results challenge the realist perspective, driven by e.g., geopolitical national interests that discourage intervention.

If we consider the timeframe of the replication data used in this paper, covering the period from 1990 to 2005, a period when the United States was commonly seen as the world's hegemon, one can interpret the positive relationship between U.S. alliances and humanitarian intervention as aligning with the liberal perspective. During this time, the United States played a central role in establishing and upholding a liberal international order, which also necessitates an international human rights community. Deudney and Ikenberry (1999: 193-194) perhaps best shed light on this by their emphasis on the importance of shared principles for the existence of a lasting political order. A crucial aspect of a liberal political order is the widespread promotion of values, with individual human rights at its core, reflecting and disseminating Western norms concerning individuals. For the liberal international order to endure, it is imperative that crises related to human rights be managed in a manner that fosters greater international integration.

Table 1 also offers empirical support for the assertion that “human rights abuses” and the “capacity of a state” are pivotal factors influencing the probability of international interventions. This aligns with earlier studies (Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Pickering, 2002) that show states with strong military and economic capabilities are less likely to face interventions. Conversely, when a state is marked by

significant human rights abuses, it tends to attract more humanitarian missions, consistent with previous research (De Jonge Oudraat, 1996; Fortna, 2004; Doyle and Sambanis, 2006; Ruggeri et al., 2018). In other words, states that possess the ability to deter external military threats and maintain internal stability are less likely to be intervened upon. On the other hand, states experiencing large-scale massacres and the forced displacement of ethnic groups are more prone to interventions due to the severity of the crisis.

Conclusion

In this paper, I replicated Murdie and Peksen's (2014) research, which laid the foundation for investigating the influence of HROs on humanitarian intervention decisions. Their research highlighted the pivotal role of HROs in disseminating information about human rights conditions to the international community, particularly during periods of intense conflict and human rights crises. These organizations employ strategies like "naming and shaming" or "shaming and blaming" to draw the attention of intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and third-party states. They found that engaging in shaming activities by HROs raises the likelihood of humanitarian interventions. However, while their research incorporates some political and economic factors, such as regime type and state capacity, into their model, I argued that the model could be enhanced by including geopolitical factors.

Previous literature reveals that geopolitics plays a vital role within the context of decisions on humanitarian intervention, but its influence is not consistently uniform and can be multifaceted. Although it reliably explains the likelihood of humanitarian interventions, the specific effects of these geopolitical factors can differ. Scholars, particularly when examining geopolitical alignment, do not consistently discover evidence supporting a uniform direction, underscoring the varied ways, whether positive or negative, in which it can impact intervention decisions. This further led to a hypothesis that suggests a correlation between geopolitics and the decision to engage in humanitarian interventions. Additionally, I predicted that this correlation might confound the statistical finding that HRO activities have a significant impact on the likelihood of interventions.

The data drawn from Murdie and Peksen (2014) covers the period from 1990 to 2005, a time during which the United States was widely perceived as the world's hegemonic power. Therefore, I contended that a country's status as an ally of the United States during this time should be regarded as carrying more significant geopolitical importance compared to being an ally with any other country. Accordingly, I constructed a measure to determine whether the intervened countries were U.S. allies and used it as a geopolitical variable. I found that the presence of an alliance with the United States is shown to increase the probability of armed

humanitarian missions. This suggests that countries with defense alliances with the United States are more likely to be the target of humanitarian interventions based on the data from 1990 to 2005. However, even when accounting for this key geopolitical factor, the significant impact of HRO activities on the likelihood of interventions remained evident.

In essence, I conclude that the initiation of humanitarian interventions is characterized by multifaceted nature, in which both geopolitical factors and the actions of HROs play significant roles. I underscore the continued importance of HRO activities in influencing public opinion and driving actions in support of vulnerable populations and human rights issues, even in the presence of geopolitical considerations.

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THE WESTERN BALKANS IN A NEW GEOPOLITICAL REALITY – A PRIVILEGED PARTNERSHIP INSTEAD OF FULL MEMBERSHIP?

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Abstract. The following paper represents the author's attempt to shed some light on the number of hypothetical alternatives regarding the seemingly stalled process of the European integration of Western Balkan states in the new geopolitical reality initiated firstly by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequently deepened by the wars in Ukraine and Gaza. Through qualitative content analysis as the primary research tool, the authors have established that the explored "plan B" options are still not considered serious alternatives by mainstream politics in the EU and the negotiating countries, although some academic interest and sporadic political suggestions regarding the topic can be noticed from time to time. The main challenge in the European Union's indecisiveness towards the region remains the dilemma of how the Union should express its unwillingness to repeat previous mistakes and accept unprepared Balkan newcomers while avoiding giving too much ground to their rival regional competitors.

Keywords: Western Balkans, EU Enlargement, Geopolitical Changes, Regional Integration, EFTA/EEA, Multi-tier Europe.

The world of tommorow

WITH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC WELL PAST ITS ZENITH AND ITS EFFECTS gradually wearing off, it is clear that the wars in Ukraine and Gaza became the main geopolitical concern of the world today. It is fair to say that, three years after its inception in late 2019, the pandemic *per se*, as Nye Jr. (2020) points out, actually did not represent a major global geopolitical turning point. However, one could say it still „irreversibly impacted geopolitics worldwide" in several ways (Chaudry, 2020: 27). Firstly, in Europe it exposed a huge „solidarity gap" among

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the EU27, whose disunity, and above all, „a lack of vision for the nearest future and for the future of the European political project" have proven to be a geopolitical problem that cannot be ignored, which was especially evident in the early months of the pandemic when member states, in an unquestionably realist manner, reverted to „pure nation-state settings" (Coratella, 2020: 35). Europe's persistent problem of strategic (dis)unity is visible even today in the member states' response to Russian actions in Ukraine, which is an event that unified the West like no other in recent history. Secondly and more importantly, the crisis expectedly revealed that there are contested regions in which rival powers are trying to establish a foothold. With Russia's vaccine diplomacy and Chinese foreign policy „displaying an astonishing level of assertiveness" (Bacon, 2020: 100), it is clear that the EU cannot afford a „geopolitical free space", since other powers „with their political gravity have tendencies to almost naturally fill that free space" (Tilev et al., 2021: 8).

It is not a surprize therefore, that the aforementioned crises have prompted the EU into action and gave an impetus to a renewed European interest in the Western Balkans. Knowing that „geopolitics does not recognize mistakes" (Tilev et al., 2021: 8) there is a sense of urgency to integrate the region to the Euro-Atlantic geopolitical block, particularly after February 2022. Given that it is not an easily achievable task, the question remains – what to do with this region?

For the past 17 years, EU membership has been a pivotal element of every government agenda and a central ideological tenet of all mainstream academic communities, public intellectuals, cultural and political elites in the Western Balkans region. After an arduous decade of painful transition and war that brought the word "balkanization" to English dictionaries, a glimmer of hope was in sight: under the condition of fulfilling the partially adjusted Copenhagen criteria, a possibility (but not a definite promise) of full membership was presented to them at the Thessaloniki summit of 2003. Ever since, the Balkan "end of history" in the EU has been the mandatory rhetorical mantra of both sides, and the "unequivocal support for the European perspective" became the default motto, most recently repeated at the EU-Western Balkans summits in Sofia (2018), Zagreb (2020), Brdo (2021) and Tirana (2022) (European Council, 2022).

It seems, however, that by the present day, the initial optimism has all but melted away. The region is still a gaping hole in EU's maps and infographics, while the accession dynamics could only be described as a "history of mutual hypocrisy", where "the block pretends to enlarge and Western Balkans countries pretend to reform" (Cherneva, 2019). Hindered by a large extent by EU's internal problems, the project of regional accessions seems to be „dead in the water", mostly because Balkan states, still entangled in ethnic problems and persisting structural weaknesses, objectively are not ready to become full members, although many of their economic indicators are comparable to those of Bulgaria

and Romania when they joined in 2007 (Grieveson et al., 2018: 13). Furthermore, what is especially sobering is that signals of "enlargement fatigue" are sent even when painful reforms are undertaken, which is probably best illustrated by the frowning grimace of Macedonia's former prime minister Zoran Zaev, after France vetoed the opening of accession talks with Albania and North Macedonia in October 2019. Adding the most to the erosion of EU's credibility is the fact that the latter was, ironically, the most collaborative in terms of EU conditioning, having changed its very name and completing the majority of the technical work "in a process of 120 days" (Koutsokosta, 2019), only to be rewarded with a French veto, an altered accession methodology, a plethora of rhetorical encouragement, and finally, a 2020 Bulgarian veto that was not lifted until July 2022 (Nikolov, 2022) .

It is fair to say that in some way, the EU has fallen victim to "its own long-term rhetoric of pan-European unification" (Dinan, 2010: 249), as the already over-stretched union in a dire need of consolidation still ideologically adheres to its proclaimed openness to all European countries (*Official Journal of the European Union*, 2012: 13-390). Perhaps it would still be early to claim that the Balkan states are seeking alternatives, but the growing number of pundits and politicians ready to examine this option ought be enough to bring to EU's attention that its soft power of attraction in the region could be seriously challenged.

The uncertainty of the current prospects of integration allows us to explore a number of hypothetical options with three underlying assumptions. Firstly, the Western Balkans will not patiently sit in the EU's eternal waiting room forever. Secondly, the EU would have to address this issue honestly at some point and finally, whatever the alternative might be, it would have to satisfy the "win-win scenario" criterion at least to some extent, as it would not be politically reasonable to create embittered and unstable countries in such proximity to the Union's core.

Bribe money – the stabiliocracy scenario

The first potential shift in policy towards Western Balkans might not be a consistent, long-term plan with a specific final result in mind, but a rather Churchillian strategy of dealing with urgent issues firstly. In this case, such an issue would primarily be China. It might be argued that the PRC's huge financial thrust westwards through the "One Road and One Belt" initiative could be its way to strategically anchor itself to the Balkans as the "soft underbelly" of Europe, but the EU's main problem lies elsewhere. Unlike the European Union, China apparently "does not rely on any form of political or other conditionality" (Babić, 2016:62). For small, deindustrialized Balkan countries accustomed to a top-down style of

communication from a position of power and exclusivity, such a model of cooperation is understandably attractive. To no surprise, this represents a major propaganda challenge for the EU, which, despite already being the biggest donor to the region in the long run, simply can't shake off its negative image*. Considering that, according to Babić (2016), the New Silk Road is more of a Chinese "New Deal" then a Chinese "Marshall plan", one could assume that it is much easier for China to present its initiatives as mutually beneficial endeavours instead of geopolitical projects in disguise. Truth be told, it is quite "strategic" of the PRC to focus on investing primarily in large infrastructure objects, something pretty obvious to the average voter.

To counterbalance the allure of China, the EU could consider opting for a more realistic approach. Instead of insisting on reforms and the "change of values", they might decide to "snooze" the final decision regarding the region's future by simply diverting a substantial amount of aid, which "could be used to delay bankruptcy and at least start some infrastructural projects that are visible" (Ђурковић, 2015: 240). A mandatory disclaimer that "it would not be a substitution for membership" would expectedly come attached to such policy, but the political realism behind this strategy would lay bare – by doing so, the EU would admit that it has been misleading the Balkan candidates for years, and that loyalty is a bargaining chip to be traded with. Without a clear plan, a bribed stabiliocracy of the semi-authoritarian regional regimes might seem like a second-best solution. Today, even the most ardent regional Europhiles have to disappointedly admit that the "membership carrot is rotten", and that this "weakens the stick that could be used to discipline WB strongmen" (Cvijić, 2017).

The revived Berlin Plus agenda could serve as one such example. Proposed in 2017 by the former German foreign minister Sigmar Gabriel as an extension of the existing Berlin process for boosting regional cooperation, a speculated 2 billion € program was envisioned as a special fund for regional economic development, especially in the field of "startup business, vocational training and IT infrastructure development" (Cero, 2017). Other EU and EFTA members were also seen as donors alongside Germany, and the idea was labelled by some as a "Mini Marshal Plan" for the Western Balkans. What is interesting, however, is that by focusing solely on infrastructure and economy, the proposal didn't seem

* Similar to the 2014 Balkan floods, a suitable example of the Union's persisting "bad PR" problem could be the way it handled the covid-19 crisis of March and April 2020. Seemingly indifferent at first, the EU eventually did provide medical help in some form (a total of 93 million euros to be gradually allocated) but not before damage was done: the response of rival illiberal powers was quicker and more organized, ensuring them yet another small victory in the propaganda war for the hearts and minds in the region. This was recognized as a problem and openly criticized by the former Swedish foreign minister Carl Bildt, who expressed his discontent about China getting praised on billboards for "symbolic aid", without a "corresponding 'thank you' for a far more substantial help from the EU" (Bogdanović and Heil, 2020).

to "address the question of stagnating democratic development and the rise of authoritarianism in the region"(Cero, 2017). This could lead to the conclusion that, behind closed doors, the logic of political realism is slowly taking over, as this initiative appeared to mirror China's OBOR program, though much more humble in scope. Such suggestions, forced out by the illiberal competitors' generous investment campaigns, can be interpreted as test balloons for checking if the public opinion in the region could be "bribed" to avoid bringing up the question of uncertain and distant membership, and settle for the benefits of an immediate injection of material aid.

The argument for such policy could be the fact that according to Eurostat, stable, long-term enlargement scepticism still prevails in many of the old members, meaning that something concrete would have to be offered in return. However, "China-blackmailing" the EU to send more funds couldn't be prolonged indefinitely. Should it be overdone, the EU's inner six could easily switch to a more unsophisticated stick approach at some point. Ultimately, the candidate countries' perception of the EU as a free money machine can certainly lead to Europe's elites asking themselves why they should reward someone for not reforming? But this kind of unprincipled behaviour could be a plausible short term strategy for one reason: to merely keep the dream afloat, and prevent the region from venturing too far of the path until a more stable solution is agreed upon.

EEA backdooring – the consolation prize scenario

Another somewhat controversial option, explored so far only occasionally and timidly, is a suggestion similar to a Brexit-inspired proposal brought forward by a group of UWE Bristol researchers in 2016 (Dadomo and Quénivet, 2016). In this scenario, Balkan candidates should lower the bar and set the EEA membership through EFTA as a new, substitute goal.

The so-called "Norwegian model" deserves more academic attention for one main reason: it would enable the Western Balkans candidates to gain access to some of the most beneficial elements of EU membership, while bypassing other, more complex programs whose standards they either don't meet or don't wish to be a part of any way, as in the case of Serbia and the Common Security and Foreign Policy, the former second pillar (CFSP). Joining the EEA would primarily mean access to the single market and all four freedoms-related "horizontal... and flanking policies", leaving out the mentioned CFSP, Customs Union, Economic and Monetary Union and Justice and Home Affairs (Dadomo and Quénivet, 2016: 4). Related to this is also the less comprehensive "Swiss model", where an EFTA country retains the possibility of separately regulating its relations with the EU and the third countries on a bilateral basis like Switzerland for

example, that has separately concluded free trade agreements with Japan and China. Separate agreements are an option for EFTA countries, "but they have generally preferred to negotiate within EFTA", which is the EU's preference as well (Dadomo and Quénivet, 2016: 3).

Considering that the region is already on the path towards the Turkish scenario of never-ending accession, this idea doesn't seem unreasonable. Offering the possibility of EEA membership (but again, as an achievable "interim goal") is a central tenet of a policy recommendation by researchers from the European Stability Initiative (ESI), according to whom "joining the single market by 2030 would be a realistic goal for all Balkan countries" (European Stability Initiative, 2020: 18). ESI researchers also pointed out that for countries like Austria, Finland, and Sweden, EFTA/EEA membership was an important school of integration and a major stepping-stone for becoming full EU members. Most importantly, they claim that it was the participation in the single market that contributed the most to the substantial improvement of economic indicators of former communist countries, underlining the examples of Romania, Lithuania and Estonia, whose GDP *per capita* in 1999 was comparable to that of some Western Balkans countries today. Obviously, joining the largest single market in the world would still require transformative reforms, but this time, a clear goal of a "realistic promise of a better life" could serve as a much more powerful incentive (European Stability Initiative, 2020: 17).

As of today (late 2023), this sort of "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush" policy hasn't been advocated by any official representative, neither in the region nor in the EU. Nevertheless, it does have its proponents. Those who view the current EU as a huge, overly-bureaucratized, German-dominated super-entity, will certainly be more inclined to support a more sovereignist and less paternalistic conception of European cooperation, embodied in the formerly UK-led EFTA concept that was once rival to the EEC/EU. For example, some time ago, this backdooring strategy was openly supported by the Serbian opposition party "Dosta je bilo" (Билић, 2018), while the economic perks of single market membership were praised by the Albanian journalist Veton Suroi, who ambitiously stated that in such a scenario, "the passport of Kosovo would have the same strength as the Norwegian one", while the Serbian sliwowitz "would have the same access to European markets as the Swiss brandy" (Руевич and Позднякова, 2019).

Of course, settling for the EEA alternative certainly has some downsides. The most obvious would be the fact that the EFTA/EEA country has no option of legally defending its interest in EU courts in the way that a member state can, as the EEA Joint Committee, the highest EEA dispute-settling body, is not of legal, but of diplomatic nature (Dadomo and Quénivet, 2016: 7). Also, such countries have *de facto* no participation in the EU law-making procedure, apart from a

merely consultative role in the Joint Committee. Theoretically, they can delay or even temporarily suspend EU decisions, but this practically never happens, which is why some authors characterize them as bare "rule takers" due to their lack of actual veto powers. One might assume that, in the case of Balkan states which are all much weaker and more susceptible to outside pressure then the current EFTA, reservations and exemptions could hardly ever be applied. The Western Balkans' humble international rankings and prestige would mean that the Swiss scenario could also be effectively written off, at least for now. With a "mass of separate agreements" that are "increasingly difficult to manage (Dadomo and Quénivet, 2016: 9)", the EU finds this model to be unnecessarily complex, and thus highly unlikely to be replicated in five or six additional cases. Nonetheless, it is possible for the post-Lisbon EU to conclude "single agreements covering the whole range of EU fields of cooperation with third countries" (Hillion, 2011b: 21).

The Norwegian scenario is, if not the best, perhaps the least unfavourable one. It is arguably the highest achievable level of integration without membership, offering deeper harmonization than the stabilisation and association program and the neighbourhood policy. With all of the listed shortcomings, it might still be the best deal the Western Balkans could get. Given the latest unemployment statistics of 9,5% in Serbia, 15,4% in Montenegro, 15,1% in North Macedonia, 14,1% in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 11,8% in Albania (The World Bank, 2023) the economic aspects of single market membership are probably the most attractive asset in the EU's soft power arsenal in the region, and it might be politically wise of the EU to utilize this fact. Reaching such an agreement would also add a dose of mutual honesty to the EU-WB relations, as the key element of European power of attraction in the region was never really about common values in the first place. This was exactly what the Fidesz government of Hungary used as main communication strategy in 2002/2003, emphasizing that Hungary's EU accession is "simply a 'marriage of convenience' that was about common interest rather than common EU values" (Semanić, 2016: 105).

The question remains, what is in it for the EU? What would make such a policy a potential "win-win" scenario, is primarily the fact that it could satisfy the EU's security-related strategic goals. To anchor the region via the single market would significantly weaken the influence of Russia, Turkey and China. They would still have the upper hand in terms of cultural capital, but with the financial element out of the equation, that would become less influential, which is proven to some extent by the Bulgarian experience. The other question is, which new challenges might arise should such a strategic plan be adopted? For example, how would the existing EFTA members be pressurized to accept impoverished and corrupt Balkan states, since EFTA and EU countries are the only parties to the EEA agreement? Could some new legal solution be worked through? Should

Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia ask for the same terms at some point? After all, former EC President Romano Prodi had once mentioned that the EEA could serve as a model for "integrated relations with our (EU's) neighbours ", while similar recommendations were made even for the South Mediterranean countries in the aftermath of the Arab spring (Hillion, 2011: 20).

With the accession process this far off, relegating the Western Balkans to the "neighbourhood" league would seem nonsensical and controversial, although the post-Yugoslav and post-Soviet states share enough similarities for such a demotion to be sensible. Once again, arguments against the consolation scenario might be propagandistic in nature, as it could ironically be in EU's best short-term interest to maintain the *status quo*. The present relations with the Western Balkans could just be a game of who needs whom more - with its prestige affected by Brexit, the EU needs to do some damage control and keep the candidate countries in the waiting room, in order to maintain an image of desirability and exclusivity, and to continue presenting itself as a "beacon" and an end goal. For example, this kind of thinking was criticized by historian Laughland (2020), who ironically noticed that replacing the UK with "poor and crime-ridden Balkan territories" is like "swapping Manhattan for Managua". Furthermore, without a consensus on this geostrategic issue, a change in official policy could not be made in an abrupt manner.

Meanwhile, what has to keep the region "on track" is the very promise of membership. Here, it would be suitable to quote the words of Natasha Wunsch, who in 2011 wrote that by granting the candidate status to all countries of the Western Balkans, "the EU would achieve much by doing little", and that "the 'symbolic value' (underlined by the authors) of such a step would be huge, as it…reinforces the credibility and leverage of EU in the region" (Wunsh, 2011: 28). One could argue that the same reasoning seems to be behind Ukraine and Moldova's hurried candidacy. While Serbia and Bosnia received full candidate status four and six years after applying respectively, Ukraine applied only five days into the war, with Moldova following suit (Vagner, 2022). Both countries received candidate status after just four months, in June 2022, implying that it indeed was more of a geopolitical symbolic gest evoked by the war, and that candidate status by itself is "no longer a cause for celebration it once was" (Karcic, 2022).

On the other hand, should the official enlargement agenda be discarded without a proper substitution, there would be nothing to prevent fragile democracies of the Western Balkans from slipping into the embrace of rival powers. Also, without EU membership as an end goal for which they claim to be the only guarantee, stabiliocratic regimes from Macedonia to Bosnia would lose their *raison d'être* and risk being replaced. For these reasons, it would require a lot of political courage and statesmanship to reach a consensus regarding the "plan

B". A move, which would perhaps be the most prudent, given the current trends and state of affairs in the EU itself.

The Third League – a multi-tier scenario

Assuming that all of the aforementioned was hypothetical and that the current enlargement agenda and the regatta principle remain unchanged, the question that remains is: what kind of Union would the region be joining at some point in the future? Would it still be the same EU it is today? Since its inception in 1957, it has been an ever-evolving organism, and is likely to remain such.

As mentioned previously, if the maximum extent of enlargement has been reached, then a period of consolidation and reform lies ahead. President Macron's notion that, if "we can't make it work with 27 of us", how "do you think it will work better if there is 30 or 32 of us" (European Stability Initiative, 2020: 5), appears to be a prevalent opinion among the original member states. What is more, the principle of American-backed premature accession as a reward for NATO membership (which worked for Bulgaria and Romania), doesn't seem to be something that Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro could count on. The reason behind this might be that the old Europe mush have realized by now that the overstretched and unmanageable EU is in the best interest of the United States and not the EU, which is why the USA is "eager to push-in Turkey and the Western Balkans" (Ђурковић, 2015: 152) and further weaken the continentalist vision of a compact and functioning Union. Additionally, the old Franco-German rivalry apparently still lingers, as the French frown upon the idea of switching the EU's "center of mass" further eastwards.

Putting the geopolitical issues aside, the fragmentation of the EU to "circles" or "leagues" is actually something that would come very natural and logical, since every functional club is primarily a gathering of the similar. This is well noticed by Professor Macijej Kisilowski from the Central European University, who argues that European institutions were "designed to govern a community of like-minded, established democracies", and not to act as a "development aid agency for politically confused middle-income countries traumatized by decades of poverty and oppression" (Kisilowski, 2017). Interpreted in a Hungtingtonian manner, this means that the pre-2004 EU was the last "good EU", a last logical and cohesive block of culturally similar nations and that it was never supposed to grow larger then the EU 15. To expect membership before the fragmentalisation into an inner and an outer EU is quite ambitious, since the Western Balkan countries, perfectly fitting the description given by Professor Kisilowski, would only reinforce the Polish-Hungarian block of illiberal democracies, which is already an *enfant terrible* of liberal European bureaucracy. Coincidently, the

Visegràd group has always been supportive of the Western Balkans (and recently, Ukrainian and Moldovan) EU accession (Juzova et al, 2023: 12-16).

Knowing this, we could conclude that the best the region could hope for is some sort of a third tier or a second rank within the outer EU. Read between the lines, the French proposal of an alternative accession methodology through step-by-step sector integration with a "reversibility component" is perhaps a hint of the upcoming relegation to a future second league (Tcherneva, 2019). As the "core Europe" pushes forward with the establishment of an ever-closer Union, which is already an aim set in the Treaty on European Union (Viëtor, 2011: 11), countries like Serbia and Ukraine could meet in some hypothetical third ring where the lines between enlargement and neighbourhood policy are blurred, or in some yet to be designed "overlapping communities detached from EU membership and transcending EU borders" (Viëtor, 2011: 14). Possibly, the reason why programmes like the Berlin process put so much emphasis on regional cooperation, or why there are ideas like the Open Balkan Initiative, could be this - the space of former Yugoslavia might just be re-established as peripheral outer EU ring of its own.

Conclusions

With the ever-present problem of forecasting in international relations, making an accurate prediction on any issue is always a daunting challenge, and foreseeing the fate of the Western Balkans is no exception to that. Nevertheless, regardless of the hypothetical character of assumptions layed out here, we dare to make a few estimations regarding some long-term trends.

Firstly, the name of the game is "political realism". Troubled by a plethora of internal problems, from the functioning of the EMU to the migrant crisis and recession, the EU seems to be ready to abandon the enlargement policy as a value in itself and replace it with a much more raw, honest, and pure form of pragmatism. In other words, the Union is now prioritizing stability at the expense of the norm projection elements of enlargement policy, which allows the candidate states to have some leverage and a better negotiating position. Meanwhile, accepting any idea that resembles the Norwegian model wouldn't necessarily be a mistake. On the other hand, should the accession process keep its present course, decisions should be a result of a thorough cost-benefit analysis instead of blind dogmatism.

Secondly, it would be fallacious to presume that identity politics and cultural divisions are a thing of the past. The now cancelled Icelandic accession would have been welcomed much more warmly, not just because of Iceland's size, or the fact that it would be a net-contributor to the budget (Souček, 2011:

31). As Viëtor (2011, 11) noticed, "to become a closer union on the inside" is hardly separable from "becoming a closed union to the outside", as the "otherised" outside in some form will always be necessary to define the boundaries of one's cultural space. This could lead to the conclusion that the perceived level of "Europeanness" is still an important factor and that even within the EU, the region of the Western Balkans will still be seen as an anteroom to the „real Europe". Whether such a suboptimal, secondary league scenario would be an improvement to the current state of being an outsider, remains an open question for politicians and analysts.

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VIETNAM'S STRATEGY TOWARDS CHINA IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ASYMMETRIC GAME

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Abstract: The decision-making of weak countries against powerful countries deserves in-depth discussion, especially the dynamic choice of weak countries' strategies in the context of power gaps. In the real geopolitical game of the South China Sea, the asymmetry of interaction between Vietnam and China may become the normal state. This article develops Womack's theory of asymmetric relations. By introducing the game matrix, a new framework of asymmetric relations containing power parameters is constructed to characterize the dynamic interaction of strategies between strong and weak countries. It is believed that the "fault line" of diplomatic attention caused by asymmetry of power is a variable of Vietnam's diplomatic strategy against China in the South China Sea. Then the author collected official statements, incident comments, and ministerial interviews related to the " Hai Yang Shi You 981" crisis from the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam, compiled them into the corpus, and captured the dynamic changes in Vietnam's strategy based on operational code and text analysis, which could provide inspiration for the settlement of island and reef disputes in the South China Sea.

Keywords: Vietnam; China; Asymmetry; Power gap; South China Sea

Introduction

HOW DO POWER GAPS SHAPE RELATIONS BETWEEN STATES? HOW DOES A weak state make foreign policy in its interaction with a strong state? The disparity in power is embedded in Hobbes' natural state. The basis of the state's pursuit of power is to ensure survival, but strategy of countries with different power attributes to achieve survival may be different, and not all participants are in a symmetrical interaction (Womack 2015: 15-17). Weak states may perceive more risk and uncertainty, making them adopt diversified strategies. In asymmetric bilateral relations, the premise that interaction can be sustained is that the autonomy of the weaker party is not eroded, and the stronger party can be

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respected. The actual situation is that weak countries are likely to encounter violations of their interests by powerful countries. When stronger countries fail to notice the asymmetry of bilateral interaction and deal with issues with an overbearing attitude toward weaker countries. The strong country may implement an exclusive dominant policy towards the weak country, which leads to the anxiety and resistance of the latter. This article tries to discuss the strategies of weak countries to respond to the infringement of their interests by powerful countries in asymmetric interactions, so as to provide a path for the analysis of the foreign policy of weak and small countries.

Whether it is the “Prisoner's Dilemma” or the “Stag Hunt” model in game theory, it is assumed that the two players are in a state of equivalence, ignoring the power gap between the participants, which will have an effect on the strategic interaction of the game players. The theory of asymmetric interaction firstly provides a mathematical parameter about the power gap between countries, and combines the game modelling of the strategic options of state players, which can produce new insight for the analysis of inter-state interaction. This article will be divided into the following three parts. The first part clarifies the definitions of strong and weak countries and puts forward the concept of asymmetric interactions based on Womack’s work, adding the factor of incomplete information. The second part will analyse the preference "fault lines" caused by the asymmetry of relations, as well as the typologies of strategy between the two countries. At the same time, this part combines the game matrix with asymmetric parameters of the power gap to construct a dynamic game between strong and weak countries. The third part will conduct operation code analysis on the corpus of 2014 "Hai Yang Shi You 981" crisis collected from the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam, so as to provide inspiration for the foreign policy study of the weak power.

Literature review

Vietnam's policy towards China has been less tracked in the academic community since the normalization of relations between the two countries. The existing studies can be divided into two categories. The first category of literature, represented by Womack (2006: 1-15), uses the framework of asymmetric relations to sort out the evolution of Sino-Vietnamese relations from the period of Song Dynasty in China to the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1950. However, this study mainly narrates ancient historical facts, and has limited inspiration for contemporary Sino-Vietnamese relations, without a clear definition of the concept of asymmetry, ignoring the dynamic process of strategic interaction between countries. Due to the power gap, Vietnam and China are currently a

mature and asymmetric bilateral relationship. Both countries want their core interests not to be threatened, so they manage differences in bilateral engagements. The second category of literature does some research on Vietnam's South China Sea policy. Thayer (2016) believes that Vietnam hopes to use the network of relations (socialist ideology) to strengthen political ties with China, strategically isolate China's behaviour, and make the latter's behaviour in the South China Sea more predictable. However, the territorial disputes in the South China Sea still reflect the wide gap in their power and means between the two countries, and Vietnam has been flexible in shaping foreign policy toward China amid this asymmetric interaction. Rongquan Zuo (2021) took Vietnam's national Defence Strategy report as the analytical text and found that Vietnam is adjusting the military establishment and developing the national defence industry to cope with territorial issues in the South China Sea. Strategically, Vietnam continues to seek "ASEANization" of the South China Sea issue, and actively seeks support from major powers outside the region for Hanoi's position. Zeng Yong (2021) analysed the political attributes of Vietnam's policy on South China Sea islands and reefs. Hanoi strengthened the rationalization of the claims of South China Sea sovereignty through national education and media narrative. At the same time, Vietnam will also consider the overall situation of China-Vietnam relations in the dispute, and will not use extreme means to harm the relationship between the two countries. Zhao Wei Hua (2020) discussed Vietnam's policy adjustment on the South China Sea after Nguyen Phu Trong was elected general Secretary. Vietnam resorted to judicial procedures on disputed islands such as the Vanguard Bank under the background of strategic competition between China and the US in an attempt to force China to make concessions.

The above research has noticed the new concepts and elements of Vietnam's South China Sea policy, but the case tracking analysis behind the policy is lacking. Vietnam's dynamic game strategy against China has been ignored, especially in an asymmetric environment. After gaining independence, Vietnam has experienced ups and downs in its relationship with China. The important influencing variables are the asymmetry of the relationship between the two countries and the reality of overlapping interests in the South China Sea. Vietnam puts national interests above socialist ideology and implements the foreign policy of subordination and resistance towards China in the South China Sea. Rather than self-restraint, compliance has been an important element of Vietnam's diplomatic strategy towards China. The combination of resistance and obedience has been key to Vietnam's autonomy over China for thousands of years. Behind this complex diplomatic strategy is Vietnam's recognition of China's strong power, and excessive focus on China.

The asymmetry of relations between countries

Asymmetric interactions have an important impact on international politics. This article argues that the asymmetry originates from the power gap between countries. The weak country is more obviously affected by the asymmetric relations than the strong country. In the asymmetric relations, the power gap is clearly visible. Although weak countries and strong countries are in continuous game interaction, there are great differences in their preferences and strategic choices, which ultimately leads to the asymmetry of returns (Womack 2015: 10). In a bilateral relationship with huge demographic, economic and military differences, both sides face different opportunities and risks. Strong countries cannot impose their will on weaker ones, resulting in a stable matrix of relationships. However, the interaction between strong and weak countries in specific fields may be full of asymmetry. The weak countries seek issues negotiation on the premise of independence, and build cooperation bonds by formulating flexible strategies towards the stronger side (Waltz 2007: 95). The incomplete information caused by the power gap constitutes the important content of asymmetry of relations. Strong countries have more resources for information acquisition and perception, so they may take the initiative in the interaction with weak countries, and take the lead in releasing diplomatic signals that are beneficial to their own interests. The lack of information on the intentions of powerful countries leads to the uncertainty of weak countries' diplomatic choices, which will lead to confusion and fear of them in the interactive environment. Weak countries may choose to shelved and compromise in the face of incomplete information, so as to maintain the durability of the relationship through interest entanglement, and at the same time enhance the ability of common identity construction with the help of institutional platforms (Rathbun 2007: 533-557).

The definition of strong and weak countries (relative)

The strength and weakness of countries is a relative concept, and its essence is the measurement and evaluation of state power. Foreign policy-making related to grand strategy, alliance commitments, economic policies, military procurement, etc. all depend on the evaluation of the relative strength of the self and others (Tellis et al. 2000). With the three debates on the theory of international relations, many scholars have put forward different measurement methods of state power, including Klein equation and Beckley's net indicator (Beckley 2018). When defining strong and weak states, it is generally agreed that a country with more wealth (GDP) and military assets can be judged as a strong country with greater autonomy in conducting diplomacy, stronger ability to set the agenda of international negotiations and influence the diplomatic choices of its opponents (Kennedy

1988). The measurement standard of power as assets means that weak countries have less resources, so they are less able to win disputes and set the agenda of international negotiations. In some international events such as regional crisis and armed conflict, they are more likely to be forced to compromise, or adopt the strategy of hedging (Bachrach & Baratz 1962). Weak countries with less resources can shape the outcome of bilateral relations through alliance and bandwagon strategies but may taking on greater risks and costs (Mack 1975).

Asymmetry of relations leads to "disparity" of diplomatic attention

Disparity in diplomatic attention caused by asymmetry of relations could lead to systematic misunderstandings in bilateral interactions. Strong states focus on overall diplomatic matters with weak states and pay less attention to specific areas, because interactions with weak states account for a small share of their international interests, so strong states are more influenced by domestic issues of their diplomatic agenda (see figure 1, region C). Weak countries have limited economic opportunities for strong countries, and strong countries are less insecure about weak countries than weak countries are about strong countries. Therefore, the foreign policy of strong countries may play a role in reinforcing the bond of interdependence with weak countries at the sub-national level, especially the border between the two countries (Womack 2004). Due to the concentration and intertwining of economic interests, interest groups in border areas will push the amicable policies of strong countries towards weak countries. Of course, this influence may be subordinate and serve the overall national interests of the strong countries. In terms of the overall diplomatic style, the powerful countries can be very relaxed and compensate for their lack of attention to weak countries with an overall friendly diplomatic posture (Kindleberger 1996). Weak countries are aware of the important role of bilateral relations with strong countries for their survival, and perceive the leading role of strong countries in the overall diplomatic atmosphere. Weak countries devote more attention and expend more political resources to analyse and predict the future behaviour and preferences of strong states, which can lead to a kind of diplomatic anxiety under excessive attention. Due to the excessive attention to the details of the bilateral relations, the weak country may perceive the strong country's dominate behaviour as the coercion and resist it. However, the weak countries' policy towards the strong countries is flexible and continuous, that is, maintaining the autonomy of diplomacy and integrity of interest, while not undermine their relations.

	Powerful countries : focuses on the overall trend
	Infringement of interests

Weak countries：over concerned about details	**obedience**	Stable relationship Weak countries respect the status of powerful countries①
	Hedging	Cracks in the relationship Powerful countries rebalance with strength②
	Resistance	Oscillation in relationship Powerful countries responded with force③

Table 1：Strategic combinations of strong and weak countries (made by the author)

In asymmetric relations, the fundamental expectations of strong and weak countries differ significantly. The strong country expects respect from the weak country, which is reflected in the weak country's guarantee that its behaviour does not threat the interests of the strong country, and cautiously regards the strong country as an actor with a larger share of power (see Table 1 ①). In this case, the interactive relationship can operate stably. However, this expectation may not be acceptable to the weak countries, which means that the weak countries are subservient to the strong countries in the fields where the interests of the two countries are intertwined. Therefore, the weak countries will clarify their differences with the strong countries in some specific fields, and even achieve the balance of power by bandwagon or alliance strategy, so as to maintain their diplomatic autonomy. If the weak country tries to draw in other country C to hedge the asymmetric relations, the disobedience of the weak country will threaten the power share of the strong country. The strong country may force the weak country to compromise with its strength, such as using economic sanctions, and the vulnerability of the weak country becomes more prominent (see Table 1 ②). The dominance behaviour of the strong country to the weak country intensified the latter's anxiety and insecurity. The weak country recognizes that it is in a dangerous predicament and may be under strong countries' pressure or even coercion. Therefore, the weak country takes the initiative to resist the strong country. However, such behaviour can trigger a crisis in bilateral relations, as the resistance of the weak country forces the policymakers of the strong country to further confront the weak (see table 2, ③). Despite the disparity of diplomatic attentions caused by the asymmetry of relations, which originated in the power gap, it is difficult for strong country to subdue a weak one through coercion. Economic interdependence and the emergence of weapons of mass destruction have reversed the structure of asymmetric relationships in some micro domains. In a nutshell, the strategies adopted by the weak countries in the face of encroachment by strong countries include obedience, hedging and resistance, and the degree of their toughness is gradually increasing, and the response of the powerful countries are dynamically adjusted accordingly. However, the strategy of the weak country may not be single in the real geographical interaction, but has multidimensional attributes, and the payoff of strategies options will also be affected by asymmetric relations. Therefore, if a

game matrix containing the benefit and cost of both sides can be constructed, the strategy choice of the weak countries can be further discussed.

Strategic Dynamic Game between strong and weak countries with asymmetric parameters

Strategy is an important element of asymmetry of relations. Weak countries, in particular, will pay more attention to the preferences of strong countries and then adjust their strategies. Similarly, strategy is a fundamental element in game theory, in which players choose strategies to avoid the risk of failure and achieve the payoff equilibrium that benefits both or more parties. This makes it possible to combine asymmetry of relations with matrix modelling in game theory. In the asymmetric geographical pattern, weak countries often switch flexibly between cooperation and confrontation, which comes from the policies adopted by strong countries towards them. When the confidence posture and antagonism preference of strong countries are identified by weak countries, the latter must have different strategy choices. Therefore, the game with asymmetric parameters can simulate the payment results of strong and weak countries under different strategy combinations, and then restore the dynamic strategy process of the two countries.

3.1 The breakthrough significance of introducing asymmetric mathematical parameters

Game is a modelling process involving two or more participants, who may have a common goal or conflict in strategic preference. The payoff of a game can be either a gain or a loss, so the game matrix provides a dynamic process for understanding the interaction between countries (Terry 1988). In classic game theories such as "Prisoner's Dilemma", there is an implicit assumption that players have equal strengths. Players make strategic choices in a fair environment and pursue the greatest gains. The matrix results only reflect the payoff gap behind different strategies. However, in a real geopolitical game, the asymmetry of the relationship between countries may also have an effect on the payoff result of the game. Therefore, in order to fit the real interaction between countries to the greatest extent, it is necessary to introduce the asymmetric parameters of the power gap between countries, so as to construct a game model in which both strategies and payoff can be dynamically changed. The asymmetric game matrix model tries to extract that weak countries will not deviate from the equilibrium track for a long time under rational decision-making, because weak countries cannot bear the cost accumulated due to confrontation, so as to obtain the reference optimal solution: if the two countries choose the cooperation strategy at the same time, it will produce a win-win situation.

The concept of asymmetric relations focuses on the power gap leading to the disparity of diplomatic attention of the two countries. However, there are still blank spot between the two countries from the difference in diplomatic attention to the heterogeneity of strategies adoption. This paper further constructs a model of the dynamic strategy between strong and weak countries from the perspective of game theory. Assume that the power share of weak countries in strong countries is w (0< w <1), and that of strong countries to weak countries is (1-w> 1) (Mesterton-Gibbons 1992; Gu 2018). Weak and strong countries have two strategic choices, cooperation and confrontation, respectively. In the ideal state without including the concept of asymmetric relations, define the common benefit of cooperation between country A and country B as B, and the cost of confrontation as C, where C>0, and the game matrix between the two countries is shown below.

		Country B (weak)	
		Confrontation	Cooperation
Country A (strong)	Confrontation	(-C/2, -C/2)	(-C, B/2-C)
	Cooperation	(B/2-C, -C)	(B/2, B/2)

Table 2: The game matrix under the conditions of power symmetry

It can be found that when country A and country B choose cooperation at the same time, the two countries can evenly distribute the common benefits of cooperation under the condition of symmetric strength, and the payoff set is (B/2, B/2). However, if the cooperation turns into a confrontation, the two countries must share the external cost -c, and the payoff set of country A and country B is (-C /2, -C/2) (Maschler et al. 2013). The strategic choice of country A and country B is not static, but a process of dynamic change. If country B chooses a confrontational strategy, it cannot obtain the benefits of cooperation but must bear the cost of investing resources in confrontation (- C). Country A can consolidate the benefits of cooperation, but it has to bear the negative externalities brought about by the confrontation of country B. At this time, the payment set of the two countries is (-C, B/2-C). Now introduce the concept of asymmetric relations into the game model. The power share of country A and country B reflects the asymmetry of the relations between the two countries, so the payoff matrix after the strategy selection will also reflect this asymmetry. After introducing asymmetric parameters, the game matrix of the two countries can be written as follows:

		Country B（weak）	
		Confrontation	Cooperation
Country A (strong)	Confrontation	(-C/4(1-w), -C/4w)	(-C/4(1-w),((B/2-C)/4w)
	Cooperation	((B/2-C)/4(1-w),-C/4w)	(B/4(1-w),B/4w)

Table3: The game matrix under the conditions of power asymmetry

By analysing the payoff matrix in Table 2, it can be found that when country A and country B choose the cooperation strategy at the same time, weak country B may adopt the behaviour of free ride under asymmetric conditions since its strength is relatively weak (0<w<1). The benefit obtained by weak country B at this time is B/4w. Due to the superior strength, country A needs to pay more economic and political resources in the cooperation, such as investment, infrastructure and institutional framework. In this case, the benefit obtained by country A is B/4(1-w). When the two countries choose the strategy of confrontation at the same time, the cost of weak country B is -C / 4W. Since it cannot take advantage in the confrontation, country B will pay too much attention to the asymmetry of bilateral relations and choose the strategy of hedging by big power outside the region to improve its own strength in the confrontation with country A. Country A bears less external costs in the confrontation, so it will examine the confrontation with country B with a confident and relaxed perception, but it will closely watch the possible hedging and extraterritorial alliance behaviours of country B. As country A is superior in strength, it may adopt a more modest policy to prevent country B from forming a power-balanced alliance with third country C through economic wooing and political coordination. At this point, if country B continues to implement the strategy of confrontation, it will have to bear huge costs. At this time, if country B continues to implement the strategy of confrontation, it will have to bear huge costs. With more economic and military resources, the cost of country A's confrontation strategy is less than the cost of country B's confrontation strategy, that is -C/4(1-w) < -C/4w, which constitutes the theoretical source of country B's excessive attention to the diplomatic trends of country A, because country B is worried that country A may infringe its diplomatic autonomy at any time without having to bear too much losses. Therefore, due to the disadvantage of its strength, the weak country B will not choose a confrontation strategy with country A for a long time out of reason, because this will harm country B's strategic interests. Country B will implement cooperative and compliant strategies under an asymmetrical interaction framework to share the economic and political benefits given by country A.

Case Study: The Hai Yang Shi You 981 crisis in 2014

This article selects the Sino-Vietnamese " Hai Yang Shi You 981" crisis as the case to verify the composition of Vietnam's diplomatic strategy towards China under the framework of an asymmetric game. The Haiyang Shiyou-981 crisis that occurred in 2014 unfolded in a Month-Day time series, which can accurately capture the dynamic changes in Vietnam's diplomatic strategy. Starting May 2, 2014, China deployed the deep-water rig platform known as HYSY-981 in the waters near the southwest of the Paracel Islands in the South China Sea to

conduct oil and gas extraction operations, which triggering strong protests from Hanoi. Vietnam has condemned China's drilling operations within its exclusive economic zone and continental shelf in the East China Sea under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). This article collects a total of 16 documents related to the HYSY-981 crisis from the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam, including official statements, comments on the crisis, ministerial interviews, and press releases, and compiles them into a corpus. The corpus is unstructured data on Vietnamese attitudes and diplomatic strategies towards Chinese behaviour. Then, this article conducts the operational code (OCA) and leadership trait (LTA) analysis on the corpus with the help of Profile Plus software. At the same time, the author also uses the R software to perform visual analysis on the corpus, and assisted reading of the original text to improve the credibility of discourse analysis. The main findings are as follows:

The article first conducts the Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) on the corpus, and the results are shown in Table 1 (Walker 2003). It can be found that the observed value of low distrust (LD) is much higher than that of high distrust (HD) (301>29). Vietnam believes that the HYSY-981 crisis can be solved by building a relationship of trust with China, including the establishment of a communication mechanism. Concept Complexity (CC) and Task scores (TASK) are greater than 0.5. Documents issued by the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, such as statements, ministerial interviews, and press announcements, use a lot of multi-dimensional vocabulary, such as *trends, possibility*, rather than single-dimensional vocabulary, such as *absolute, unacceptable*, thus increasing the space for Vietnam to seek peaceful cooperation to resolve the crisis. Vietnam also believes that it needs to be aware of the interaction with China and pay attention to China's feelings, so as to achieve a task-oriented settlement of disputes by proposing negotiations and stating position. Belief in One's Own Ability to Control Events (BACE=0.5) and Need for Power and Influence (PWR=0.4737 < 0.5) mainly focused on the emotional analysis of verbs in the corpus. Vietnam is confident that it can handle the current crisis with China, but it is trying to use persuasion and negotiation, instead of using power and influence as the tough means to defend its maritime sovereignty.

LTA	LD	HD	CC	TASK	BACE	PWR
Score	301	29	0.5377	0.5291	0.5	0.4737

Table 4: Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) of the Corpus of HYSY-981 crisis

Then, the article conducts Operational Code Analysis (OCA) on the corpus. The coding scheme constructs an indexable score by typologically dividing the direction and intensity of transitive verbs, which can be used to explain decision-makers' political beliefs on political events. The results are shown in Table 2. It can be found that Vietnam does not believe that the crisis is a hostile conflict

with China in nature (P1=0.1319 > 0), but Vietnam still has a pessimistic political attitude towards the event, believing that there may be confrontation with China around the drilling platform (P1 < 0.25 and P2 =-0.0568 < 0). Hanoi thinks that resolving the crisis through the amicable approach requires a huge effort. Therefore, Vietnam adopts a more flexible strategy, including building cooperative relations with China and strengthening diplomatic coordination with ASEAN, the United States and other major powers (I1=0.3, I2=0.1167)*. With the help of R software, the author also conducts visualization analysis on the corpus, including generating word clouds and word frequency statistics (Figure 1, Figure 2), and found that there are a large number of words related to *withdraw, sovereignty, law, bilateral, peaceful, and agreement* in the corpus. According to the corpus text, the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has repeatedly emphasized the sovereignty principle of international law in its statements, requiring China to withdraw the "HYSY -981" drilling platform. At the same time, Vietnam also attaches great importance to the strategic partnership with China and hopes to proceed from the long-term interests of the parties, governments and people of the two countries and reach a bilateral agreement with China based on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea to manage territorial disputes in the South China Sea, thereby safeguarding the region peace (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam 2014, June 18). The strategy adopted by Vietnam in the crisis is multi-dimensional, including resistance and cooperation and has undergone dynamic adjustments. Hanoi's strategy toward China could be divided into two stages according to the timeline:

OCA	P1	P2	I1	I2
Score	0.1318	-0.0568	0.3	0.1167

Table 5: Operational Code Analysis (OCA) of the Corpus of HYSY-981 crisis

The index meaning	The index range
Count of high distrust observations（HD）	Count
Count of low distrust observations（LD）	Count
Conceptual Complexity score（CC）	1.0<CC<1.0
Task score（TASK）	1.0<TASK<1.0
Belief in Ability to Control Events score（BACE）	1.0<BACE<1.0
Need for Power score（PWR）	1.0<PWR<1.0
Nature of political universe (Hostile/Friendly)（p1）	-1.0<P1<1.0
Realization of political values (Pessimism/ Optimism)（p2）	-1.0<P2<1.0
Direction of strategy (Conflict/Cooperation)（I1）	-1.0<I1<1.0
Intensity of tactics(Conflict/Cooperation)（I2）	-1.0<I2<1.0*

Table 6: The index meaning and range

* The Operational Code Analysis (OCA) is finely divided between -1.0 and +1.0, including -0.25, -0.5, +0.25 and +0.5, for a more detailed measure of how positive and negative cognition and strategy are.

Figure 1: Word cloud analysis of the corpus

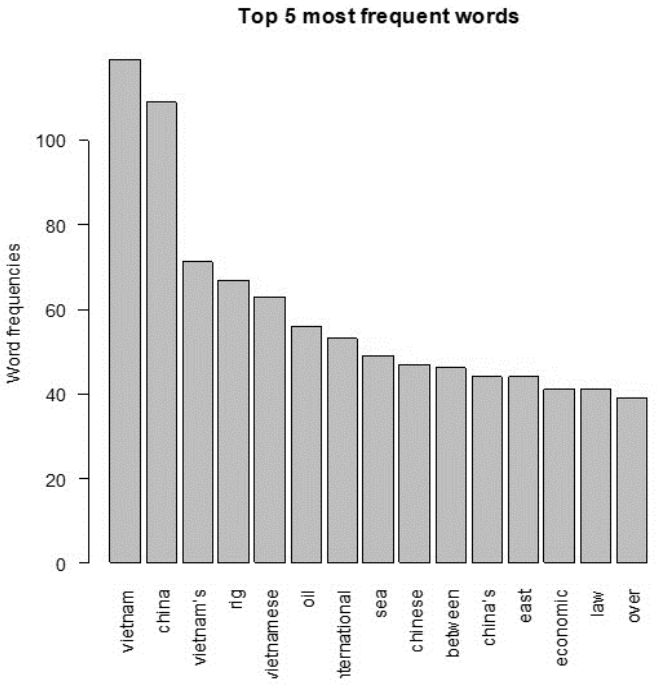

Figure 2: Word frequency analysis of the corpus

4.1 Tentative resistance (From May 2, 2014 to July 1, 2014)

A. Vietnam expresses diplomatic protest

At the beginning of the crisis on May 2, 2014, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam protested against China's deployment of HYSY-981 drilling platform. Vietnam reiterated that China's oil and gas exploration infringed its exclusive economic zone, violated international rules such as the United Nations Law of the Sea and the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DoC), and damaged relations between the two countries. China acted confidently in the early stages of the crisis for its power advantage, manifested in the military and fishing fleet numbers in the South China Sea. In early May 2014, China has sent naval frigates and a large number of Fishing boats from Guangdong province to drive away Vietnamese coast guard vessels and fishing boats, and fired water cannons at Vietnamese fishery supervision personnel to prevent Vietnamese maritime law enforcement forces from surrounding, harassing and damaging the drilling platform. Vietnam has also countered China's actions through diplomatic channels, defending its maritime sovereignty through peaceful means such as taking pictures, collecting evidence and inviting international journalists to investigate (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of VietNam 2016, April 15).

B. Using multilateral diplomatic mechanism

In mid-May 2014, Vietnam adopted a hedging strategy against China with the help of multilateral diplomatic mechanism. In the ASEAN-U.S. Dialogue, Vietnam joined other Southeast Asian foreign ministers to demand that China stop violating Vietnam's sovereignty and refrain from taking actions that undermine regional peace and stability. Vietnam also seeks to achieve a peaceful solution to the HYSY-981 crisis with China through the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of VietNam 2014, May 19).

C. Attracting the United States to balance China's behaviour

Vietnam and the United States discussed issues in their bilateral relations in July 2014. Hanoi has improved coordination with the United States on the South China Sea issue by joining the Non-Proliferation Security Initiative (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of VietNam 2014, July 1). The United States expressed its support for Vietnam and is deeply concerned about the escalation of tensions that directly affect regional peace, maritime security and stability in the statement of foreign ministers with ASEAN. The United States opposes the threat of the use of force to unilaterally change the status quo. Washington has called on

China and Vietnam to negotiate a more binding code of conduct considering the importance of the South China Sea (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of VietNam 2014, June 17).

4.2. Buffering strategy (June 18, 2014-July 15, 2014)

D. Developing relations with the Chinese Communist Party and buffering tensions between the two countries

Along with the diplomatic protest over China's deployment of the rig, Hanoi is also using party diplomacy to send conciliatory signals to Beijing. Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister Pham Binh Minh met with Chinese State Councillor Yang Jiechi on June 18, 2014, reiterating that the Communist Party, the Government and the people of Vietnam attach great importance to strengthening good-neighbourly and friendly cooperation with China (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam 2014, June 18). Pham Binh Minh required China to withdraw drilling rigs and vessels from Vietnamese waters and refrain from actions that could trigger conflicts in the interests of relations between the two countries and ruling parties. Vietnam's foreign ministry has been in contact with China more than 30 times during the crisis, hoping to negotiate differences under the framework of international law, expand bilateral and local exchanges, and consolidate the strategic partnership between the two countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam 2014, July 15).

5. The logic behind Vietnam's diplomatic strategy

Vietnam's mutual-socialization strategy forging bonds with China

Mutual-socialization provides an analytical perspective for understanding Vietnam's cooperative strategy towards China. Mutual-socialization is a process of shaping common identity, making the target country obey and conform to collective norms and values (You 2021). The activities of mutual-socialization include cultivating common norms and values (Wentworth 1980). Norms diffuse and internalize into the identity of the target country in the process of socialization, thereby forming a framework for relationship stability (Xiaoyu 2012). Vietnam seeks to build the normative bond with China so as to transform China's power advantage into mutually adaptive orbits. Government dialogue is regarded by Vietnam as a mutual-socialization strategy for regulating relations

with China, and Hanoi hopes that high-level visits will establish acceptable guiding principles for bilateral relations, so as to set a timetable and norms for negotiations in specific areas with Beijing. Vietnam's mutual-socialization strategy emphasizes common interests, especially promoting joint actions with China, thereby promoting the institutionalization of maritime security (Thayer 2011). Vietnam and China began conducting joint patrols in overlapping areas of the Beibu Gulf in April 2006, including holding search-and-rescue exercises. By 2021, the two sides have conducted 31 joint patrols (Peng & Ngeow, 2022).

Party diplomacy buffers and insulates differences with China

In addition to the government-to-government channel, cultivating and strengthening the relations between the two ruling parties could maintain the unity of the two socialist countries and was supported by Vietnam. Party-to-party relations play an important role in the foreign affairs of socialist countries. Compared with formal state-to-state interactions, party diplomacy is more flexible, subject to fewer diplomatic rules and etiquette constraints, making it easier for small countries to promote the "emotional offensive" against big countries. Vietnam and China are both socialist countries, and the communist party plays an important role in the political and economic affairs of the country. The exchanges between the ruling parties reflect the ideological connection between China and Vietnam. Vietnam sees ideological ties as preventing the worst scenarios with China, isolating and buffering conflict. Despite its power disadvantage, Hanoi uses party ties and revolutionary friendship to create a common political identity with China (Le 2013). When dealing with disputes over islands and reefs in the South China Sea, Vietnam will flexibly put political ideology above its national interests and send a signal to China through exchange of ruling party visits, in order to encourage the latter to put the common interests of ideology at the forefront of the relationship between the two countries, in order to get rid of the disadvantaged position of strength competition. When there is a crisis in the relations between the two countries, Vietnam will increase the frequency of high-level visits between the two communist parties, send special envoys to deliver messages to Chinese Communist Party, and promote the improvement of bilateral relations through the warming of the relations between the ruling party. The International Department of the Central Committee of the Vietnamese Communist Party actively maintains communication with the International Department of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, and has extensively established contacts with Chinese politicians, experts and scholars. This kind of multi-dimensional "party diplomacy" provides a

mechanism and means for Vietnam to dialogue with China on an equal basis (Shambaugh 2007).

"Great power invitation" hedges China's power advantage

Great Power invitation is essentially a Vietnamese version of hedging. Hedging in the diplomatic arena is defined as a purposeful act in which Vietnam places policy bets on countries designed to offset China's power advantage, in order to secure Hanoi's long-term interests. Vietnam's hedging strategy reflects the triangular interaction of China, Vietnam, and the United States. Hanoi's approach to handling the asymmetric relations with China is based on "preparing for the best and calculating for the worst", with inviting other powers to engage in the South China Sea issue (Goh 2006). As the weaker party, Vietnam would judge China's actions as unduly threatening and look to the US and ASEAN partners for security guarantees. At the system level, Vietnam's hedging strategy is driven by balancing China's power and influence, promoting Hanoi's economic and security interaction with regional sub-powers, such as Japan and India, and using the relationship between one major power as a lever to improve relations with another (Kuik 2008). Vietnam avoids following a country unilaterally when it clearly harms national interests (Goh 2005). As a country with relatively little bargaining power, Hanoi sees developing relations with third countries could not only promote economic pragmatism and get rid of its huge trade deficit with China, but also build stronger strategic coordination with powers outside the region through direct engagement. Vietnam hopes to expand military cooperation with the United States to contain China's military superiority and invite the United States to involved deeply in the South China Sea affairs.[*]

Conclusion

Vietnam's diplomatic strategy towards China emphasizes the use of external power, including supporting the dominant position of the United States in Southeast Asia, and at the same time attract as many countries as possible, including Japan and Russia, to the South China Sea in the virtue of multilateral framework of ASEAN, so that the interests of these countries are entangled with each other. Vietnam tries to play the role of “hedging rider” among the great

[*] On June 23, 2012, the Chinese National Offshore Oil Corporation invited international bids for oil and gas lots within Vietnam's exclusive economic zone (contested by China with its U-shaped, nine-dash line claim), which is the area of joint Vietnam-Russian oil and gas exploration projects. See: PetroVietnam protests Chinese firm's oil building. TuoiTreNews, June 28, 2012.

powers, thereby balancing China's power. This comprehensive approach enables Vietnam to enhance its ability to manage the regional order in the South China Sea, while incorporating China into a more complex balance of influence framework at the regional level, using rules and institutions to reshape common identity with China. The binding of national interests between extraterritorial powers and Vietnam may indeed make up for or even offset China's asymmetric power, but Vietnam may still face the challenge of being squeezed or even marginalized by large powers, especially Hanoi may be at the forefront of Sino-US competition. Therefore, Vietnam's current South China Sea policy is not adhered to the United States or take sides with the US-Japan alliance. On the contrary, Vietnam maintains close relations with China in the economic, trade and political fields through ruling party diplomacy.

China and Vietnam are both socialist countries, and their divergence in the South China Sea should not affect the overall situation of bilateral cooperation. In the face of Vietnam, which has relatively weak power, China needs to remain strategic prudence, proactively regulate the situation in the South China Sea, avoid impatience and bullying, and maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea as a responsible major power. China and Vietnam can strengthen economic interaction through regional economic cooperation frameworks such as the Belt and Road Initiative and the RCEP. At the same time, China also needs to improve military transparency, convey the image of peace and cooperation through amicable media narrative, abide by the South China Sea behavioural rules, and win the understanding of ASEAN member states for the defence of its core interests in the South China Sea. The South China Sea involves the sovereignty and development interests of China and Vietnam. Only with mutual trust and cooperation between the two countries can maritime disputes be resolved in an atmosphere of equal interactions.

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