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## **The Changes in International Power Relations and Their Geopolitical Consequences**

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### **Abstract**

Through looking back to the transformative processes of the past 25 years, this study outlines the determining characteristics of the current international power relations, predominantly with an analytical approach. It seeks to answer the following questions: how should we approach the analysis of the international system, the changes that have occurred during the past 25 years, and today's power relations? In doing so, the author offers an overview of how international power relations have transformed from the break-up of the bipolar world order to the current multipolar setup; how the concept of power and its elements have evolved; and how the range of influential actors of the international system has broadened, in overall changing the hierarchical structure of the whole system. Finally, the study also offers an analytical picture of the most important characteristics of international relations, identifying where the stakes for Europe and the European Union currently lie, as its course of development is also the primary strategic determinant of the future of Hungary.

*Keywords:* power relations, international system, demographics, economic power, soft power, military power

### **From a Bipolar World Order to a Multipolar International System**

Over the past 25 years since 1991, the strongest organizational and geopolitical change in international relations was the shift of the *international system* from a bipolar world order to a multipolar one. The bipolar world order was an international system based on the military and ideological confrontation of the two world powers (the United States and the Soviet Union) and their alliance systems (the NATO and the Warsaw Pact, respectively), and was characterized with high risk and high stability in terms of security policy. Being aware of their military parities that were sufficient to destroy each other, the two superpowers with global ambitions and capabilities, i.e., the United States and the Soviet Union, carefully made sure that both themselves and their allies refrained from open military confrontations

and pushed all conflicts to the peripheries, where they did not directly attack each other either, but relied on their proxies to fight the local wars (proxy wars) (MEARSHEIMER, 2006).

The *international system* is a system created by nation states, wherein these days not only the governments but also international organizations (e.g., UN, EU, NATO), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other non-state actors (e.g., multinational companies, nations without a state, armed organizations and terrorist groups) (may) play a role.

If we intend to divide the 25-year process of the shift from a bipolar to a multi-polar world order into phases, the years of 1989–1991 and the years of 2001 and 2008 were milestones, international events indicating significant changes that made visible the structural changes of the international system.

One of the most significant global political changes of 1989–1991 was the breakdown of the geopolitical blocs. However, with the breakdown of the Warsaw Pact, the Comecon and the Soviet Union, i.e., one of the “disciplinary” poles of the bipolar world order, did not lead to a more stable but to a more unpredictable security environment. It was well indicated by the changes of regime in Central and Eastern Europe and the tectonic movements in a geopolitical sense, one of the key aims and elements of which became the exit from the Soviet bloc and joining the Euro-Atlantic security structure. However, the breakdown of the Soviet Union and its system of allies put a stop to the former strong ideological confrontation and military parity and thereby considerably reduced the possibility and a chance of any direct military confrontation between the great powers (MEARSHEIMER, 2006: 147–159). After the fall of the bipolar world order, the world entered a new phase of low risk and low stability in terms of security policy.

At the beginning of the 1990s, bipolarity, which provided a great deal of stability, was replaced by a unipolar world according to many experts (IKENBERRY et al., 2011; MAGYARICS, 2011). In the new geopolitical situation, the United States and the NATO led by the U.S. were left without any competitor and were able to make the Soviet Union and its successor, the Russian Federation, accept their own ideas on the German reunification and arms control without practically any considerable Russian resistance.<sup>1</sup> Washington successfully enlarged NATO with Central and Eastern European states that had left the Soviet Bloc (1999), also including the Baltic countries which are classified as the “near-abroad” of Russia (2004). In those years, there were no countries other than the United States that could be considered a global actor also in terms of military capabilities (BELOPOLSKY, 2009: 14–28.). Other experts and, declaratively, the great powers, talk about a multipolar system even after the fall of the

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<sup>1</sup> In relation to arms control in November 1990 the United States and the Soviet Union as well as numerous other European states signed an agreement on the reduction of European conventional weapons. In June 1990, the U.S. and the Soviet Union agreed to maximize their chemical weapon arsenal in 5,000 tonnes, respectively, and to stop their manufacturing. In July 1991, an agreement was reached on the restriction of strategic nuclear weapons (START I). The Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) was signed in January 1993 and the second agreement on the restriction of strategic nuclear weapons was also signed in the same month of the same year (START II). The Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction was signed in 1997. Other confidence and security building agreements were also adopted and an agreement on Open Skies was also concluded (N. RÓZSA–PÉCZELI, 2013).

bipolar world order saying that unipolarism in the sense that the United States had been able to enforce its interests and resolve regional conflicts without any military intervention just like during the Cold War, was already shaken by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 and the First Gulf War that followed (KRAUTHAMMER, 2002: 10.). They add that during the ten-year period after 1991 there were no actual international conflicts that affected the direct environment, i.e., fundamental interests of the weakened successor of the former world power (Russia) or the potential world power, China. They therefore agree with Charles Krauthammer, who defined the temporary position of the United States in global policy as a “unipolar moment” in December 1990 (KRAUTHAMMER, 1990).

The myth of the unipolar international system proclaiming the international dominance of the United States was finally destroyed on 11 September 2001, when terrorist attacks hit New York and Washington claiming almost 3,000 victims. Although 9/11 is still often referred to as a turning point in political publicity, which fundamentally changed the international system, in fact the tragic event only altered the views of the U.S. and the general public of the world in three important aspects. On the one hand, it became obvious that the United States was not invulnerable either. On the other hand, the world realized that the international system had some non-state actors who were able to significantly influence the behaviour of the major state actors of the system. And thirdly, the wars in Afghanistan and in Iraq revealed the limits of the global military capabilities of the United States. Although it is true that the strongest power of the world was able to establish and maintain extensive military forces and fight wars for many years in Afghanistan and Iraq, it was unable to win those wars despite the primary military successes (overthrowing the political system prevailing until the intervention) or to leave a stable security environment behind (TIERNEY, 2015; THOMPSON, 2015). Despite the limits of the American capabilities, the United States is the only actual global power in the current international system that can enforce its global interests with its global tools of power, relying on its global system of allies. The United States is not only the single actual global power but, in view of its other capabilities as a great power, it is also a hegemonic power, i.e. an actor in the international system that is able to most powerfully shape the system (MOWLE-SACKO, 2007: 7–15.; MAGYARICS, 2011).

In the international literature the third milestone in the process of the shift from a bipolar to a multipolar world order was the war between Russia and Georgia in August 2008 (KAGAN, 2008: 71.; PAPKOVA, 2011: 48.). Similarly to 9/11, it is not a real milestone either, as the international system did not become multipolar then, but is rather a theoretical turning point. By then the international public was aware that in the post-Soviet area Russia might have much greater capabilities and better opportunities to enforce its interests than the United States or the wider international community. In more general terms: the great powers may have much better opportunities to enforce their interests in their own direct environment, their own regional *security complexes* than a global hegemonic power. The international community also had to face the same in the civil wars of the Middle East that broke out in 2011–2012, or in 2014 during the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and the breakout of the separatist fights in Eastern Ukraine as well as in relation to the behaviour of China in the island disputes of the South China Sea. All these events indicate that due to the behaviour of the actors of the international system, the current international relations may be described with a certain type of new realism, which will be described in more detail later (RICHARDSON, 2008). This new realism provides more opportunities to the actors of

the system to enforce their interests but it also puts greater responsibility on them in terms of the harmonic operation of the international system.

The *security complex* is a group of states, the main security ideas and problems of which are so much interconnected that their national security problems may not be reasonably analyzed or resolved separately (BUZAN et al., 2006: 66.).

In summary, it may also be said that the current international system is specifically multipolar: on the one hand, the United States still has a hegemonic role in the world, but on the other hand, the great powers have much greater influence and better options for enforcing their interests in their own regional security complex than anyone else. This does not mean that there is no hierarchy in the current international system. It only means that this hierarchy cannot always be observed or enforced in the direct vicinity of the regional great powers. It is not possible partly because there are also local actors “under” the global hegemon and regional great powers who may also become main actors in a sub-system, although such a role is usually temporary. It is enough to refer to Al-Qaeda that committed the terrorist attacks in 2001 or the so-called “Islamic State” in relation to the Syrian civil war. These terrorist organizations, originally consisting of a few hundred members, were and are capable of taking actions that determine international relations for years and become influential actors in the international system in just a few years. Their example is also important in terms of studying the international relations because it also highlights a much more general problem. Namely that while analyzing or observing international conflicts or processes, we must take into account the interests and actions of many actors. Not only those who are traditionally known as global actors, but also of regional and local actors.

Although the states that have legal entity continue to be the most important actors of the international system, they are not at all the exclusive constituents of the system. In addition, in the literature the actors of the international system are generally divided into sub-state and supra-national groups. While the sub-state group contains nations and minorities (e.g., Kurds, Basques), various international groups (e.g., non-governmental organizations, terrorist organizations) and the individuals, the supra-national category includes federations, international organizations with legal entity (UN, NATO, EU) and other groups organized at the level of the international system (e.g., G7, G8, G20).

## Sources and components of international power in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

The hierarchy of the international system is primarily determined by the power capabilities of its actors, their related behaviour and mutual interdependence. This latter has clearly gained strength following the fall of the bipolar world order,<sup>2</sup> with the relations conducted on increasingly strong channels between societies and with the more intensive and accelerating globalization in the form of the flow of information, transport, finances and economy

<sup>2</sup> Let us just think of the globalization of financial markets, the expansion of transnational and multinational companies, the accelerated flow of information and the increasingly unimpeded flow of the four freedoms.

(GARTZKE et al., 2001: 393–397.; RANA, 2015), even despite the fact that, parallel with these processes, fragmentation and localization are also present in the international system (BIERMANN et al., 2009; ZÜRN–FAUDE, 2013: 123–125.; HINES, 2007). Before moving on to the presentation of the sources and components of international power in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it must be stated that defining “international power” is extremely difficult and disputed considering the permanent change and diffuse interpretation of this concept (MORGENTHAU, 1978: 4–15.; NYE, 2011: 5–10.; CAMMACK, 2008).

In this paper, the term “international power” refers to a situation when one actor of the international system is able to influence others (NYE, 2004a: 1–2.), and we will discuss only those sources and components of power, in relation to the importance of which there is consensus among experts. In this regard we must talk about *economic, diplomatic, cultural* and *military* aspects of power as parts of the definition. In addition, we must also discuss their components, such as demography and military capabilities recognized as “*hard power*”, economic performance and development, which is also referred to as *hard power* by certain analysts or as intermediary elements by others, as well as diplomacy and model value, which is generally described as “*soft power*” (CAMMACK, 2008: 6.).

*Economic power* means influencing others with economic tools and the ability of exerting such influence to make others be more economically dependent on us than we depend on others. Such areas include resources, absolutely necessary for life (basic foodstuffs and potable water) and control over the key factors of economy (capital, energy and energy sources, industrial raw materials, industrial capacity, technology, trained workforce and market). When economic interests are enforced in the form of sanctions or embargoes, it is the power of compulsion, but when it takes the form of an attractive business model or approach or a pattern induced by economic welfare, it is clearly the power of attraction. Economic power is in close correlation with military power, especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (NYE, 2011: 74–86.; SZÖRÉNYI, 2009: 149–150.).

*Diplomatic power* means the ability of influencing the behaviour of others with diplomatic tools in order to make them co-operative in achieving the goals of our own foreign policy. Diplomatic power may be applied in bilateral relations, in multilateral relations and through international organizations. *Public diplomacy* is an important tool of diplomatic power in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, within the framework of which states try to inform, influence and convince the general public of other countries in order to attain their own foreign policy objectives (VAN HAM, 2005; NYE, 2008).

*Cultural power* means influencing the behaviour of others through the widely interpreted cultural attraction and social model value or having the ability to exert such influence to attain preferred foreign policy objectives.

*Military power* means influencing the behaviour of others by using or threatening with armed forces. The essence of the use of armed violence is to make an impact on the behaviour of others rather than causing a loss or damage with violence. The desired effect is achieved by projecting further violence, associated with the assurance that violence can be avoided if the will of the party using power is accomplished. Of the military power functions, deterrence and compulsion has an effect on the intentions of the enemy. Defence is aimed at the capabilities and not the intentions of the enemy: the objective of deterrence is to make the enemy refrain from action, while the purpose of defence is to resist action (SCHELLING, 1966: 3–4., 78–79.; SNYDER, 1975: 3.).

The role and importance of the states in the international system are determined by their economic, diplomatic, cultural and military capabilities and the efficiency at which they can use these to shape the system, as well as the extent to which they can compensate for the capabilities they are lacking. However, in terms of analytical aspects, two things should be taken into account. On the one hand, capabilities also strongly influence the approach towards the international system: those who are strong in a military sense, represent military power, those who are strong economically, represent economic power and those who do not have such powers, stress the importance of *soft power*. On the other hand, although according to most analyses the military power classified as *hard power* is put in first place during the assessment of the power relations of the international system, in reality and in practice economy, politics and widely interpreted culture (model value) as power tools always exceed military power. It is so not only because in general everyone looks at military power as the final resort, but mainly because without a strong economy no state can have a strong army.

## Demographic trends

Among the components of international power, we must first discuss demography, because the power of each nation stems from its residents and citizens. Under identical circumstances, nations that have a large population in general are not afraid of nations that have a small population, those who produce effectively are not afraid of those who work less effectively, and the international system has always preferred effective nations with large population in the long run. A large population, coupled with advanced modernism, means a lot of reproduced workforce, a strong economy, significant political influence, a large and strong army, i.e., considerable international power and prestige.

However, as it is generally known, demographic inequalities and extremes can predominantly influence power capabilities not only in the underdeveloped but also in the modern societies. By these days, the demographic challenges of over-population, diminishing population and ageing society and their consequences, such as the shortage of food, agricultural degradation of the natural environment, environmental pollution, the shortage of fresh water, accelerated urbanization and migration have become standard components of globalization challenges and strategic analyses. For the purposes of the subject matter of this study, it is a clear message of the latter that even the actors of the international system look at the transformation of the demographic relations as a factor that significantly influences the global importance of individual countries, naturally not on an exclusive basis and generally in the medium and long term.

According to the UN demographic projections, the global population will continue to grow in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, although at a slower pace than in the past, and will reach 11.21 billion by the end of the century (UN, 2015: 1). Looking at the demographic trends by regions, a different future vision opens up that can significantly influence the power relations and hierarchy of the international system.

Table 1

*Demographic changes in the regions and in a few states of the world, 2015–2100*

	Population (million people)			
	2015	2030	2050	2100
<i>World</i>	7.349	8.501	9.725	11.213
<i>Africa</i>	1.186	1.679	2.478	4.387
Angola	25	39	65	138
South Africa	54	60	65	65
Ethiopia	99	138	188	242
Democratic Republic of the Congo	77	120	195	388
Nigeria	185	262	398	752
Sudan	40	56	80	127

	<b>Population (million people)</b>			
	<b>2015</b>	<b>2030</b>	<b>2050</b>	<b>2100</b>
<i>Asia</i>	4.393	4.923	5.267	4.889
China	1.376	1.415	1.348	1.004
India	1.311	1.527	1.705	1.659
Japan	126	120	107	83
<i>South America</i>	634	721	784	721
Argentine	43	49	55	58
Brazil	207	228	238	200
<i>North America</i>	358	396	433	500
United States	321	355	388	450
Canada	35	40	44	49
Mexico	127	148	163	148
<i>Europe</i>	738	734	707	646
United Kingdom	64	70	75	82
France	64	68	71	75
Germany	88	79	74	63
<i>Eastern Europe</i>	292	278	251	208
Russia	143	138	128	117
Hungary	9.8	9.2	8.3	6.5
<i>Oceania</i>	39	47	57	71

Note: Eastern Europe = Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Byelorussia, Poland, Hungary, Moldova, Russia, Romania, Slovakia, the Ukraine.

Source: UN, 2015

Of the large regions of the world, *Africa* is the only continent that faces a population boom at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The population of the continent will increase by 493 million by 2030, and by 1.29 billion by 2050 compared to the current figure, while, by the end of the century, the present figure of 1.18 billion will increase to 4.38 billion, meaning 3.5 times of what it is now. The key issue to the future of Africa and the regions close to it is whether this huge increase in population can be matched with sustaining and preserving capabilities of the continent, mostly affected by global climate change. Will African countries transform into states that offer more secure living and a more promising life to their citizens? If this is the case, then due to a few African states the continent may join the international arena as more active and influential actors (CORNELISSEN et al., 2012: 194–197). If it does not happen, and that scenario seems more likely at the moment unless external assistance becomes available, Africa will face permanent conflicts, increasing security policy challenges and risks e.g., by becoming the largest source of international migration in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. With such a population increase, migration will be a major challenge simply by its volume. If, following the current global trends, 3% of the population of Africa decided



to leave their homes, by 2030 15 million, between 2030 and 2050 24 million, and between 2050 and 2100 57 million people would leave their homes.<sup>3</sup>

According to the projections, the currently significantly slower increase of the *Asian* population will turn into a decline by 2050 (when the population reaches 5.26 billion) and by the end of the century the continent will only have 4.88 billion inhabitants. Following China and South Korea, after 2030, at approximately the middle of the century, India and Indonesia will face the problems of declining population that Japan and Europe have been facing for years: ageing society, known as super-aged society (when the population over the age of 65 reaches 20%), a declining group of active workers, decreasing economic growth and risks related to the stability of social welfare systems (UN, 2015: 33–37). In addition, in Pakistan, China and India, where male children *are valued more* by families, a considerable and durable shift may be expected in the proportion of men and women (BAUER, 2015).

As Table 1 indicates, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century *South America* will follow a demographic course similar to that of Asia: its population will grow until the middle of the century but then it will decline more intensively (8%) than the population of Asia (7%). The question there is the same as in most regions facing a decline in their population: can the continent become attractive enough the period of the growing population to encourage inhabitants of other regions of the world to immigrate?

Apart from Africa and Oceania, *North America* is the continent, where the population is likely to grow in the 21<sup>st</sup> century partly and primarily due to immigration and partly due to the (relatively) low productivity rate (2.06). However, as a result of immigration, the continent should expect changes in the set of social values and the conflicts that accompany such changes (MCELVEIN, 2016). The management of those conflicts may be made easier because, according to most projections, the immigrants expand the economy of the United States both at present and in the medium term by not taking jobs from the local residents born there (CARD-PERI, 2016; BROOKINGS, 2016).

*Europe*, which is the most important continent for Hungary, is already in a demographic downturn and will face further significant population decrease in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Although until 2030 the overall population decline of the continent is only projected at 0.5% and until 2050 at 4.7%, by the end of the century it may reach 12.4% (–92 million inhabitants), which is the highest among the regions experiencing a decrease in their population. If Europe does not replace part of its diminishing population with immigrants, the decline of population will have similar, but more painful consequences for our continent than for Asia.<sup>4</sup> Our immediate region, defined as Eastern Europe in the UN database, will face even more dramatic demographic changes in the future, as its population may diminish by 4.7% by 2030, 14% by 2050 and by even 28% by the end of the century if the current trends will be sustained. The two main reasons for the decline of population in our region is the rather low fertility rate (around 1.4) of the countries of the region and emigration to Western Europe, the pace of which will only accelerate in the future if Europe does not accept any immigrants.

<sup>3</sup> According to the data of the International Migration Organization, in 2014, 3.2% of the global population, i.e., 235 million people were migrants.

<sup>4</sup> In social and political aspects, primarily not poverty but rather much more the impoverishment process of the middle class and the subjective perception thereof as well as the increasing polarization of the income relations of society may cause problems.

Although, as indicated above, the demographic features and processes themselves do not determine the place or importance of a state in the international system, it seems likely that the regions and states losing their population the most, will also lose some of their influence, while states with increasing population can increase their influence if they can simultaneously also increase their economic, social and political capabilities.

## **On the components of economic power**

The United States could win the Cold War because it had a stronger economy and greater economic power than the Soviet Union. As the Soviet Union was unable to become an economic competitor of the United States or to present a lasting model to its allies, the Soviet Union practically remained unidimensional in terms of power, i.e., the two global powers were in parity only in military aspects between 1945 and 1991 (MAGYARICS, 2009: 26.). Therefore when in 1991 the military power was pushed into the background in international relations with the fall of the Soviet Union and the cease of the Warsaw Pact, the United States apparently gained a very good position by winning in two fields (military and economic) as it beat the Soviet bloc with its economic power.

However, contrary to the Eastern bloc, the Western alliance had a diversified background already during the Cold War. It could rely on military-defence co-operation (NATO) and on the bargain among the constituent powers whereby the United States helped economic recovery, consolidated and strengthened, for example assisted the powers within its scope of interests, especially Germany and Japan, in attaining the position of an economic great power in exchange for the recognition of the hegemony of the U.S. in the West. In Western Europe, it also supported economic integration and the establishment of the European Union. However, after 1991, when the significance of military power decreased in the changed security environment, these countries became competitors of the United States in economic power. On top of everything, the Deng Xiaoping reforms in China practically matured by the same time, as a result of which China, having the size of an empire, became the second largest economy in the world in a short time, and has grown into the largest economy by now. A number of other Asian countries, including Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore and Indonesia, have also achieved similar spectacular development. Brazil in South America, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States in the Middle East and Nigeria in Africa should also be mentioned as countries achieving significant economic progress. Over the past 25 years, an increasing number of countries shared power within the international economy and states have also become global or regional economic competitors of the United States which, contrary to Western Europe or Japan, did not fall within the influence of the U.S. hegemony directly. The role of the U.S. in their economic success was and still is limited to the fact that primarily Washington provides access to energy sources (Middle East oil) and to some of the raw materials for them and guarantees the security of some trading routes (e.g., Strait of Malacca) (MAGYARICS, 2009: 27.).

Although even the general public interested in politics associate economic power with the value of the gross domestic product (GDP), which is the goods (products and services) produced for final consumption during a particular period, in reality the power ranking can be established in a much more complex manner, by taking into account numerous other

factors. Besides economic experts, more and more politicians have pointed out the same since the 2008-2009 financial and global economic crisis. It is because although China is already ahead of the United States in terms of GDP measured at consumption power parity, the productivity, efficiency and innovative ability of the U.S. economy is still far greater than those of the Chinese economy. While in China 1.3 billion people produce the gross domestic product under the conditions of state-controlled capitalism, in the U.S., where there is full and open market economy, only 321 million people do the same. This shows that the productivity of the national economy is rather important regarding the rankings of international economic power, in relation to which not many conclusions can be drawn from a ranking established based only on GDP. Productivity depends on three fundamental factors (which should also be taken into account in an analysis): the amount of capital assets and liabilities of a particular country and how effectively it can use them; the trained work force, i.e., the quality of work produced by employees; and the level of the advanced technology used in production, i.e., the effectiveness with which automated workforce can supplement the human workforce. These are only factors of production, while finances (the role played in the international financial activities and the financial system of the world), foreign trade (the share in global trade), or the available economic resources (energy sources, raw materials, natural resources) have not even been mentioned, although they can also significantly influence the international economic power of a state. Besides the traditional factors, further aspects should also be taken into account, such as the structure of the economy (ratio of high or low added production value), the quality of the consumed products (instead of the simple quantitative approach), the quality of non-market and therefore non-priced or non-measurable services (education, health), the distribution of income and wealth or social aspects, as well as quality of life and sustainability. Consequently, various power rankings consisting of various relevant indicators may be prepared (STIGLITZ et al., 2009).

We need to see though that the power acquired cannot always be transformed into actual influence on its own because international economic relations are extremely complex, where the economic or economically useful natural resources, the ownership of development tools and capacities represent only one component of power. Another component is the position held in terms of influencing economic decisions and the execution and control of those decisions, i.e., the hierarchy within international economic processes. The third factor is the relations and a state's position in the international distribution of labour, and finally there are also the aspects of international income distribution and income re-distribution, which are determined by the three components listed above and which also strongly determine to what extent the power acquired by a particular state can be transformed into influence (SZENTES, 2005: 30).

According to most experts, in relation to the economic power of the public actors of the international system, the relative weakening of the positions of the United States was clearly the most important process of the last 25 years (ZAKARIA, 2011: 15–18.; NYE, 2015: 72–76.). Although according to most analysts it is still the U.S. that has the strongest economy that determines the global economy, but its former advantages have been reduced in almost all areas of the economy primarily because of the rise of its competitors. We must underline that the weakening is relative. It is partly because the “lost volume” of that power is divided among a number of actors (although only China is a potential serious competitor for the U.S.). The other reason is that globalization, which was the strongest in the flow of

information and finances, also affected other areas of the economy and established strong mutual dependencies in the global economy over the last 25 years that made the ordinary operation of the system the key interest for all main actors. It significantly limits the options and intentions of the emerging economies to sustain or enhance economic power conflicts between each other on a durable basis. It does not prevent opportunities of shaping and influencing each other through their economic power (MASTANDUNO, 2011: 175–176.), in which the U.S. has more experience than anyone else.

Finally, we must not overlook the fact either that there are number of non-state actors in the world economy (e.g., multi- and transnational companies<sup>5</sup> and strengthening integration organizations) which themselves have increasing economic power and they are not necessarily in line with the national efforts or the national attempts of the great powers. Market globalization, the borderless organization of production and sales, the appearance and strengthening of multinational, transnational and globally integrated companies called for managing economic issues at international level, to which all actors must adapt. It is not accidental that in relation to economic power most analysts see the successful future in economic integration. Integration means the distribution of power among the actors.

### **The current significance of the components of soft power**

Even though the term *soft power* reflects upon *hard power*, based on its substance, it would be better to use the term “power of attraction” (SZÖRÉNYI, 2009: 148.). Joseph Nye, who coined the term at the beginning of the 1990s included the types of behaviour, tools and policies that may influence the behaviour of another party through value-based attraction, encouraging the other party to accept its goals voluntarily, without any compelling force (NYE, 2004a: 5–11.). These days hardly anyone questions that power is exercised with such components; the only subject of the dispute is whether *soft power* itself can result in power or an increasing power or it can only be effective as “*soft power*”, combined with the tools of *hard power* (NYE, 2010).

*Soft power* may stem from a number of sources: the culture of a country, attractive to others, the values of politics worthy of following, or foreign policy with moral authority (NYE, 2004a: 11.). In fact, in certain situations, military and economic power (liberation, peacekeeping, aid and support) can also function as the tools of *soft power*, although both are referred to in the literature as compelling, *hard power* type power tools. In recent years the experts examining international relations have tried to measure the capabilities of the states within the scope of *soft power*, taking into account the objective and subjective components of that type of power. While the former is associated with the quality of public administration, the dissemination of information technology, culture, business atmosphere, education, the size of diplomatic network and the intensity of involvement in

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<sup>5</sup> Multinational companies are jointly owned companies with shareholders of different nationalities. However, the different ownership is not directly affected in the operation of the company, i.e., the control and business policy of the company is consistent and profit-oriented, just like in any single-nationality joint-stock company. Transnational companies, however, are joint-stock companies, which do not only simultaneously operate in a number of national economies through their subsidiaries and contractors, but also have multinational capital ownership.

global problems, the latter includes less quantifiable factors, such as the popularity of the culinary culture and produced technical and luxury items of a given country, the level of welfare, or the hospitality of the local residents or the importance of the country in terms of foreign policy (McCLORY, 2016: 18–23.). In this paper we only focus briefly on the two major elements and areas of *soft power* which these days have the greatest impact on power relations: diplomacy and model value.

Looking at the actors of the international system, from the point of diplomatic power capability, it is easy to realize a few things. On the one hand, it is easy to see that the possibility of enforcing power is closely related to *belonging to international organizations* (the success of pursuing the interest of each state predominantly depends on its international integration), and, on the other hand, that influence is closely related to the status within the organization. As under international law after WW2 the greatest international power relating to peace and security was vested in the permanent members of the UN Security Council, the SC members are the strongest actors of the international system based on that status, irrespective of their actual power capabilities. They make binding and executable decisions with consensus (even on the use of violence), may set priorities for the agenda of international relations (by pushing events into the foreground or to the background) or may block decisions that are detrimental for them or for their allies with their veto. At the bottom of the hierarchy are those countries who only have an observer status in the global organization (e.g., Palestine) but even based on that they can take part in the activities of a number of specialized UN organizations, including the International Court of Arbitration. Besides, it is not difficult to see either that if we accept that international organizations represent the norms of the international community, the integration and international recognition of a country is closely related to its attitude to the norms and its norm-compliant behaviour. In general, being a member of an internationally integrated organization, the status obtained in the organization and any earned prestige are important for all members of the international system, even for the great powers that occasionally avoid the SC. For the small states representing the majority of the international community, it is clearly of key importance because often such multilateral organizations are the only source of their diplomatic power.

*Cultural diplomacy*, which intends to make another state committed to its own interests by presenting and making attractive the widely interpreted cultural values of the particular state (art, science, education, philosophy of life, etc.), is an increasingly important element of *soft power*. The significance of this area is clearly indicated by the fact that some states maintain a whole network of cultural institutions across the world to disseminate and promote their language and culture. Table 2 shows well the states that prefer cultural diplomacy (in general *soft power*) and the regions towards which that tool of power is applied. Another information ideal for orientation is that most cultural institutes operate in the United States (107), Germany (59), India (45), the United Kingdom (40), Italy (37), France (37), Spain (36), China (33) and in Russia (33).

Table 2

*Number of cultural institutes of those countries that have the largest network of international cultural institutions in the world, across various regions of the world*

Country	Cultural institute	World	Europe	MENA	Asia	Africa	America
China	Confucius Institute	332	107	9	84	18	103
France	French Institute	229	82	54	43	37	13
UK	British Council	196	67	33	53	26	17
Germany	Goethe Institute	159	71	16	33	15	24
Italy	Institute of Italian Culture	92	49	10	11	3	19
Russia	Cultural Centre of Russia	82	52	2	24	0	4
Spain	Cervantes Institute	78	39	15	9	1	14
Portugal	Camões Institute	67	31	3	8	18	7
India	Cultural Institute of India	57	6	3	39	4	6
Japan	Japan Foundation	26	7	1	13	0	5
South Korea	Cultural Centre of Korea	25	8	0	11	1	5
Brazil	Cultural Centre of Brazil	24	5	0	0	2	17

Source: British Council, 2012

Over the last 25 years, *public diplomacy* has been one of the most robustly developing fields of diplomatic power. Originally public diplomacy referred to the communication activity of governments with which the leaders of the particular country intended to influence the foreign and domestic public, and primarily the elite that had a direct impact on political decisions in support of their own foreign policy objectives. However, with the restructuring of publicity and the development of communication tools, i.e., appearance of the internet and social media, public diplomacy has transformed significantly and the public opinion expanded with the influence of those who had an indirect impact on political decisions. The number of parties taking part in such activities also increased significantly because these days besides governments, scientific institutions, political, strategic research centres, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), transnational companies and also terrorist groups use this tool of international influence.

The extent to which the social, political and economic structure of a particular state is attractive (*represent a model*) and the popularity of its political views and values internationally is an important element of *soft power*. We must talk about this area briefly because, according to numerous analysts over the 25 years following the end of the Cold War and especially during the years after the start of the 2003 Iraq war, the Western states promoting the values of democracy and liberal market economy also suffered significant losses in this respect (NYE, 2004b; MAGYARICS, 2009: 19–25.; COX, 2012; OUALAALOU,

2016). Stating it differently: contrary to the famous projections of Francis Fukuyama, the global victory of liberal democracy never occurred (FUKUYAMA, 1989: 3–18.). Although it is a hardly disputable fact, it does not represent a new “decline of the West”. Although it is true that the export of democracy with the tools of *hard power* (Iraq, Afghanistan) and the double standards applied towards autocratic regimes (support to one and overthrowing others) weakened the authority of Western democracies in numerous regions of the world, the 2008 financial and economic crisis also destroyed the reputation of the liberal market economy; and it is also obvious that communism was not the only challenger of the social model of the liberal democratic market economy. If we look around, we can see a large group of alternatives, which all acted and still act against the Western model as competitors. They include the Russian “sovereign democracy”, the successful “state capitalism” of some Asian countries, the “communist capitalism” of China and the Islamic societies built on norms different from the Western set of values (MAGYARICS, 2011: 31.). However, it is likely that it is a natural situation. What is more, most of these structures emerged independently from the liberal democratic market economy model. Taking all these into account, it is perhaps more accurate to talk about an expected or desired victory that never happened instead of a loss. It is even more so because in most international assessments and lists that classify the states on the basis of their abilities within the scope of *soft power*, Western European countries and the United States are still in leading positions (McCLORY, 2016). In relation to the position of the European countries in this order, we can also draw another conclusion: in the successful application of *soft power* from among the components of international power, even the medium-sized and small countries (e.g., Switzerland, Sweden, Denmark) can easily beat much greater powers (e.g., Japan, Italy, China, Russia) (McCLORY, 2010; 2015; 2016).

## Change in the role of the military power

Following the fall of the bipolar world order, military power has changed most spectacularly among the components of international power. With the fall of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, the security environment, the nature of conflicts have changed, the concept of battlefield has expanded and the military sector and the military forces tried to adapt to them.

In relation to the security environment, the general public of the world experienced the breakdown of the bipolar world order as the disappearance of potential military conflicts between the military blocks and a decrease in the threat and probability of wars between great powers and in general between states. Looking back to the past twenty five years, most probably many questioned that trend, because at least 16 armed conflicts, officially referred to as international wars, have occurred.<sup>6</sup> However, it is important to see that the majority of those were of limited extent and intensity, most of them related to border disputes or civil

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<sup>6</sup> Invasion of Kuwait by Iraq (1990), First Gulf War, (1990–1991), Armenian–Azeri war for Karabakh (1994), Peru–Ecuador border war (1995), NATO–Yugoslavia war (1999), Ethiopia–Eritrea war (1998–2000), Kargil war between India and Pakistan (1999), Six-day war between Rwanda and Uganda (2000), Bangladesh–India border war (2001), War in Afghanistan (2001–2014), Spanish–Moroccan war for Isla del Perejil (2002), Iraq war (2003–2011), Cambodia–Thai border war (2008–2012), Djibouti–Eritrea border war (2008), Russo–Georgian war (2008), Annexation of Crimea by Russia (2014).

wars and, in fact, only the first Gulf War in 1990 and 1991, the NATO–Yugoslavia war in 1999, the war in Afghanistan of 2001–2014, the Iraq war of 2003–2011 and the Russo–Georgian war of 2008 may all be described as classic wars between states. However, the latter were launched, conducted by the great powers or they played a main role in them (United States, Russia) often based on international authorization or in international coalition (First Gulf War, NATO–Yugoslavia war, war in Afghanistan), in which cases they were certain that the conflict would not escalate. These wars did not question the general U.S. and European perception of the reduction of the threat of major armed conflicts referred to above, as a result of which other dimensions of security, previously pushed to the background (economic, environmental, societal), became important for societies.

This did not mean any major reduction in the number of armed conflicts, only that intra-state conflicts and the lower intensity civil wars with less military threat to international security took the form of national-ethnic conflicts. Occasionally even they may entail serious economic and societal security risks and consequences, including the increasing prices of energy sources and raw materials, reduction of trade relations, mass migration, terrorism; but in most cases handling the consequences is not the responsibility of the military sector. In civil wars and national-ethnic conflicts non-state security policy actors took the main roles besides the state power (extremist groups, paramilitary organization, separatists, terrorists, international criminal organizations, war lords, etc.) supported and equipped with weapons by a great power from the background either directly or by intermediaries. Even the local power often used “private armies” against them blurring the borderline between civilian and military security (SZENES, 2015).

After the end of the Cold War, the defence expenditures of the world were decreasing for ten years (between 1988 and 1998) and then began to rise again between 1999 and 2012 and have been stagnated ever since (SIPRI, 2016). The initial decline was affected by three main factors: the economic crisis of the countries of the former Soviet bloc, more specifically of Russia, the disappearance of the need for and reduction of mass armies and the fact that the NATO member states used the former resources of defence budgets for welfare expenses in the initial period of the *détente* (peace dividend). As following the fall of the bipolar world order the significance of territorial defence, that was crucial during the Cold War, has decreased significantly even though armed conflicts remained, the nature of armed conflicts changed and there was no need for the mass armies established after 1945 demanding a huge amount of resources any more. The smaller armed forces replacing them demanded fewer, more advanced weapons and systems, operated with better trained soldiers. However, the advanced weapons were more expensive, partly because during their development the armed forces had to follow the rapidly changing technological development of the world that radically shortened development and purchasing cycles (from 20 to 5 years), and there was a spectacular shift in the ratio of knowledge and material content towards the more expensive knowledge content (80% knowledge, 20% materials) (VÁRHEGYI–VASS, 2007: 4). The change occurred partly because armies were only able to obtain better trained soldiers if they at least tried to offer wages and benefits that kept pace with earnings outside the military sector. These were the main factors that explained the repeated rise in defence expenditures. It was an additional fact that the regional great powers also tried to follow the increase in the U.S. defence budget that accompanied the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.



Finally, in relation to the transformation of the military power, we must definitely indicate that over the past 25 years the battlefield and nature of armed conflicts have also extended and changed. In addition to the traditional land, air, maritime and spatial battlefields, a cyber battlefield also emerged. This includes cyber-attacks and defence operations that are conducted against the enemies using computer and network devices (HAIG-VÁRHEGYI, 2005: 197–244.; BERZSENYI, 2015). As over the past 25 years the weak and *fragile states* became one of the main problems of international security, the armed forces had to take part in intervention operations, peacekeeping and stabilization missions where the mixture of modern and post-modern, as well as post-modern and pre-modern wars could be observed (RESPERGER et al., 2013: 13–93.).

In summary we can say that if we intend to evaluate the rankings of the actors of the international system in terms of the military component of international power, then those states are on the top of the list that spend significant resources on their armies, supplying them with the most advanced weapons, adequate as a deterrent and matching the nature of conflicts, and are capable of deploying their forces in every part of the world. Naturally, most of such rankings are topped by the nuclear great powers (GFP, 2016). Even despite the general and increasing consensus on the rigorosity of the international nuclear regime prohibiting its use, the nuclear weapon has remained one of the most important tools of a great power even after the Cold War (this is why some states intend to have it). All rankings of nuclear great powers are clearly led by the United States, which is so much ahead of its competitors in the development of military capabilities and military forces that by now a true gap has developed between the U.S. and its European NATO allies in terms of capabilities, which often also imposes a challenge to the success of joint operations. These days the American armed forces are the only army that can deploy troops from the territory of the United States to remote locations, maintain them there for a long time and conduct two wars simultaneously. In general, Russia is in second place, also spending vast resources on the development of its military forces during the presidency of Vladimir Putin and, compared to the Western powers that reduced their military expenses for a while due to the 2008 financial and economic crisis, continued to support the Russian military sector even after the start of the crisis. China is in third place: the country began to develop its military capabilities to match its demographic features and economic capabilities over the past 25 years, developing an army that matches a regional great power with global economic ambitions. The medallists are usually followed by Great Britain and France, who in a number of areas – including the modernization of certain weapon systems – beat even Russia and China, but the size of their army is much smaller than that of those countries. A number of regional powers have also made significant progress in their military capabilities, the military ambitions of which do not extend beyond their own region. These are India in South Asia, which began to progress in a similar way as China and India's peer competitor, Pakistan; as well as Japan, Indonesia, South Korea and Taiwan in East Asia which began to respond to the Chinese military modernization; while such actors include Israel, Saudi Arabia and Turkey in the Middle East. Furthermore, the countries that are situated in a conflict zone or are also parties to a conflict also belong to this category.

## The actors and characteristics of the international system

The power structure of the current international system can be described on the basis of the assessment of the components of international power described above. The *United States* continues to be the only truly *global great power*. The U.S. tops all lists of components of international power: it still has the strongest economy in the world (even though it has lost some of its former advantage over the past 25 years), it is the main actor in the international financial system and its leading position in military power is non-questionable. In terms of its international position, it is of key importance that its military capabilities are determining not only in its direct region but in three other regions (Europe, Middle East, Pacific Ocean and Eastern Asia) as well, and that it is capable of deploying military force to any point in the world. This factor also puts it into a leading position among the permanent members of the UN SC. Although the dissemination of its political views and values is strongly criticized, the U.S. has always been able to maintain the relative advantage of the popularity of its social, political and economic structure over its competitors.

The United States are followed by *great powers* in the international power hierarchy that are not only dominant and interactive main actors in the power relations of their direct region but also have global capabilities in one or more areas of international power. From those countries *China* should be mentioned first, which now lies in second place in the order of international power based on its demographic characteristics, growing economic performance and diplomatic power. In addition, the United States looks at China as the only reasonable future challenger for the position of the global leading power. It is a fundamentally favourable aspect of this strong great power, restricted within strong strategic and geographic barriers and practically focusing on the South China Sea that the global middle class of the world, the size of which is currently estimated at 2 billion and is expected to be doubled over the next few decades, will emerge in Asia (PEZZINI, 2012). The estimated resource demand and environmental impact of the dynamic Chinese and Asian development will at the same time pose a serious global challenge.

The *European Union* is also considered to be one of the great powers in the rankings referred to above. The EU currently has the second largest economic performance behind the U.S. and its diplomatic power is also significant. In terms of model value, it is even ahead of America. At the same time, in military aspects the EU is unable to behave as a great power partly due to the lack of internal political unity and certain capabilities and in fact during the past few years it has not been able to favourably influence or shape its direct security environment either (CSIKI, 2014: 48–51.). Europe's specific international power position primarily stems from the fact that the European Union is not yet a classical great power, while the largest European powers (United Kingdom, France and Germany) are no longer global great powers in the classical sense of the world despite their economic performance, military capabilities or diplomatic positions. Or at least they are not states that could individually compete successfully against the United States or China. In addition, as indicated earlier, the demographic trends also suggest the future weakening of Europe.

From the aspect of demography, *Russia* is in a more dramatic situation than Europe, and in addition to its military capabilities and international diplomatic position, it is kept among the large powers by its fossil fuel resources. The demographic decline is also a major challenge for *Japan*, for which the great power status is guaranteed by its economic perfor-

mance and its close alliance with the United States. One of the most important questions for Russia is whether it can modernize or it will remain stuck with the status of a “one-pillar energy great power” economically (Sz. BÍRÓ, 2014: 42.).

Within international power rankings the great powers indicated above are followed by *regional powers* that are the main actors in their own regions based on their economic, political and military powers and are also individually capable of extending their power to other nearby regions (BUZAN, 2004: 71.). Such states are India, Pakistan and Australia in Asia, Iran, Israel, Turkey and Saudi Arabia in the Middle East, the Republic of South Africa in Africa and Brazil in South America. Due to their increasing capabilities, experts consider a few of them as potential great powers.

The next category in international power rankings is the group of *middle powers*, which share the main characteristics that individually they are not capable of impacting the whole international system, only as a group of states or through international organizations, yet they may be dominant actors in their own regions with significant extra-regional activity in a particular segment of international power. It is also important to note that the term “middle power” is difficult to define because the local value of a middle power significantly depends on which region of the world it exists in; on the power potential of the whole region, its prevailing internal relations, the degree of structuralizing in the region, etc. This partly explains why Australia, Canada and Sweden are classified as middle powers similarly to Argentine or Malaysia (JORDAAN, 2003: 165–171.).

At the bottom of the ranking of international power are the *small states*, which in general do not have any significant influence on the whole international system either on their own or as a group. They have limited individual international power competences and abilities. Their competence usually extends to a particular sub-system of the international system or to their own direct environment, if provided that it is not questioned by the great powers. However, it is important to note that the small state category is not associated with the size of the territory or population of a country (if it was the case, Israel could not be one of the regional powers of the Middle East) but fundamentally depends on the capabilities, performance and international behaviour of the country. In relation to the latter we must also be able to see that small states can improve their international positions mostly through diplomatic power (membership in an organization, alliance, conforming with international norms) and when they can exploit their geopolitical features efficiently (REITER–GAERTNER, 2001). In relation to the small states it should also be noted that the international system and its power relations are dynamically changing, which allows for the change of statuses of the actors in the rankings of power, in general and mostly organically, or sometimes even within a relatively short period. Naturally, it does not mean that a small state or a middle power could turn into a global power but a small state may obtain some power potential, which is generally typical for middle powers and the other way round, a middle power could show the characteristics of a small state within the international system.

During the 25 years since the fall of the bipolar system, we have witnessed two major processes in international power relations that fundamentally determine the current international system. On the one hand, the power vacuum that followed the breakdown of the Soviet Union was filled by new emerging large powers and regional great powers, primarily from the rapidly developing Asian region (*power transition*), and, as a result of the global information resolution, not only the state actors of the international system, but also non-

state actors gained international power, thus some *power diffusion* occurred (NYE, 2011: xv–xvi). The globalization, lower cost and free flow of information and communication gave an opportunity also to non-state actors to intervene and join global politics independently from states. Thus the current international order is not only horizontally multipolar (at the level of states), it is also vertically segmented due to the appearance of the supra- and sub-state actors. This structure of power relations is a major challenge for states intending to enforce their influence internationally too, even though they are still the main actors of the system “officially”, namely according to international law. In this international structure, due to its nature, all actors come across power barriers, and that also applies to great powers. The mutual dependence that emerged with the globalization of finances and the economy or global problems (climate change, organized crime, terrorism) which also force actors to co-operate and to make compromises have not even been mentioned yet.

As indicated earlier, the current multipolar world order is characterized by a certain type of pragmatic, new realism, free of any ideology and values at the level of the great powers. This stems partly from the power relations of the international system, namely that compared to the bipolar world order international power is divided among several actors at the top of the hierarchy. These days the global efforts and power of the United States are not confronted by another global power but by the efforts and power of multiple, yet weaker great powers (China, Russia and, in certain areas, the European Union). However, similarly to the United States, these great powers use a wider range of tools of their available power potential in their own region or in their direct environment to enforce their interests or to prevent the assumed or actual efforts of the large powers opposing them. They also use tools that are not permitted under international law or international norms. As an example, Russia, who interprets NATO enlargement as the extension of the sphere of interest of the United States, made it clear in 2008, with the five-day-war, that Georgia’s NATO accession would violate its interests and in 2014 it prevented the approach of Ukraine towards the European Union by annexing the Crimean Peninsula and supporting the separatists in Eastern Ukraine. China, for whom maritime trade routes and access to the hydrocarbon resources in its neighbourhood are of strategic importance, is in permanent dispute involving frequent threats of armed incidents with eight countries focusing on the tiny islands of the South China Sea and Eastern China Sea and their disputed sea borders (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, Vietnam and Japan). These examples illustrate well that both great powers look at their immediate neighbourhood, either openly or less openly, as their own sphere of interest.

Whenever great powers rely on the use of violence the most frequently occurring question is whether this new realism and new sphere of interest policy could lead to a wider and greater conflict of great powers or, in other words, whether it could lead to the conflict-based power politics known from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Most experts believe that it is very unlikely, due to three main reasons. First, because the strategic approach of great powers is rather similar despite all their disputes; second, because their strong mutual dependence also limits their own ambitions; third, because although their military capabilities are not identical, the difference in their capabilities does not provide any advantage of strategic scale to any of them. Consequently, the risk of a direct armed conflict between great powers does not increase significantly even within the framework of new realism, but the “proxy wars” may become more frequent (as we can see in the case of the Syrian civil war), if great powers believed that they can protect themselves from the consequences.

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