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Contemporary Geopolitical Conflicts in International Politics: Underlying Factors and Prospects for Peace

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Abstract

Humanity has long experienced recurring political conflicts, many of which have escalated into large-scale wars, including the two world wars of the twentieth century. In the contemporary world, despite attempts to establish systems of collective security, conflicts remain an inherent element of the global political process. Under the conditions of globalization, regional and local conflicts increasingly acquire global significance, influencing economic, social, and cultural development. The growing intensity of such conflicts highlights the need for deeper scientific analysis and for the search for effective mechanisms for their resolution. The purpose of this study is to identify, through an analysis of scientific literature, the factors that contribute to the emergence and development of geopolitical conflicts and to outline possible approaches to overcoming them. The research applies both general theoret-

ical and political science methodologies. The structural-functional approach makes it possible to analyze geopolitics as a system of interconnected elements, while the systemic approach considers it within the broader framework of global political processes. Behavioral analysis helps explain the motivations of political actors, and institutional perspectives highlight the role of states, international organizations, and other participants in international relations. The findings show that geopolitical conflicts are influenced by shifts in the global balance of power, competing strategic interests of major actors, and transformations of the international order. Effective conflict prevention requires balancing national interests with global stability and strengthening international cooperation.

Keywords: global security, power competition, strategic rivalry, world order transformation, conflict prevention

1. INTRODUCTION

The current geopolitical situation is characterized by a sharp increase in political tension throughout the world. Conflicts that have lasted for decades have intensified, and new political and military threats have also emerged. Russia's large-scale aggression against Ukraine is further evidence that the political situation is characterized by extreme instability, which is intensified by the threat of new military conflicts, for example, the Taiwan problem, the impact of the pandemic, and the severe economic crisis caused by global quarantine measures. The fake referendums initiated by Russia in the occupied territories may become a precedent for strengthening the territorial claims of other states, including European ones. Political problems affect the development of the world economy through trade wars, the struggle for resources, and the application of economic sanctions against the aggressor as a means of economic pressure on the violator of basic norms of international law. Therefore, the problem of geopolitical conflicts and their impact on international politics is a relevant and urgent task for modern political science.

The purpose of the research is to identify, based on an analysis of scientific literature, the factors that contribute to the development of geopolitical conflicts and to propose possible options for overcoming these conflicts.

Geopolitical conflicts are among the fundamental and vital problems of humanity; therefore, they are always in the focus of modern science, including political science, international economics, philosophy, military studies, and related fields. In theory, political conflictology is a distinct branch of political science. It must be recognized that this problem belongs to the category of multifactorial phenomena and, therefore, requires a comprehensive approach to its study. For example, Charpin et al. [1] studied the impact of international tensions on the development of world science and the consequences of this process for responding to global challenges. They noted a sharp decline in scientific activity and information exchange between scientists from states involved in interstate conflict. They also noted the negative impact of geopolitical tensions on the development of science in countries that are traditionally culturally or geographically close.

Models for measuring the degree of geopolitical risk as a means of regulating international tension were studied by Caldara and Iacoviello [2]. Their scientific work is oriented toward international economics, since it is designed to predict geopolitical risks in financial investment planning. However, the proposed concept of developing a formula for measuring the level of political or military threat has the right to exist. Theoretical issues of geopolitics are analyzed in the article by Subra [3]. The author studied local conflicts in different regions of the world and identified the reasons and factors that transform these conflicts into geopolitical ones. The scholar believes that the main task of scientists in the field of geopolitics is to identify the role and motives of actors in local political conflicts in terms of revealing their true intentions and political strategy.

The scientific work of Afonso et al. [4] concerns theoretical issues of measuring geopolitical risks in terms of their impact on the economic development of European countries. In the authors' opinion, geopolitical tensions and global uncertainty in border countries contribute to the growth of risks to the sovereignty of European countries. The economic consequences of geopolitical conflicts were studied by Bretas and Tippmann [5]. For these authors, the issue of geopolitical risks is one of the main factors in measuring general threats to international business, along with phenomena such as technonationalism and trade protectionism. In general, the predominant attention of researchers of international conflict is focused on practical aspects of the problem, particularly on the peculiarities of the impact of global conflicts on the development of international business. From our point of view, this direction has the right to exist; however, it is necessary to take into account the fact that all models are too schematic and cannot predict with a high degree of probability the impact of a particular conflict on the nature of international economic relations, because there will always be many more influencing factors than any mathematical model can contain as variables.

Various aspects of the impact of geopolitical conflicts on individual economic problems can be traced, for example, on the basis of the publication by Hu et al. [6]. The article deals with the negative impact of geopolitical conflict on the development of the idea of the Great Silk Road, initiated by the Chinese government as part of the Belt and Road project, which was intended to connect Europe and China. The Russian-Ukrainian war is defined as the main geopolitical risk for the implementation of this project. The publication by Chi et al. [7] is devoted to a comparative analysis of the impact of international global conflicts on the oil and petroleum products market. The authors of the article reach the disheartening conclusion that political dangers and threats, in addition to economic conditions, are the main causes of fluctuations in oil prices on the global market. Kurečić [8] analyzes the interaction of geopolitics and geoeconomics. The author considers geopolitical conflicts as a continuation of the struggle for resources, namely as geoeconomic-geopolitical conflicts.

Great importance in the scientific literature is given to the Russian-Ukrainian war as one of the main geopolitical conflicts of our time. Thus, in the study by Shu et al. [9], the war against Ukraine is considered from the point of view of the negative impact of the conflict on the activities of transnational companies that deal with "high-risk regions", to which the authors attribute Russia. Researchers consider the war against Ukraine to be an unprecedented geopolitical conflict that negatively affects the development of international economic relations. The scientific work by Kulkarni [10] addresses the problems of Russia's war against Ukraine. The causes of the conflict, the course of events, and the consequences of the

conflict for global security are investigated and predicted. The author defines this conflict as a geopolitical trap in which almost all the leading countries of the world are involved. Special attention is paid to the role of Donald Trump and his interaction with the Russian president.

The study of the impact of hybrid war on the mood of the population of a country involved in this conflict deserves attention. Hybrid war is accompanied by powerful information attacks on both its own population and a potential or real enemy. The issue of the reflection of the Russian population on the Russian-Ukrainian war was studied by Gugushvili [11]. A careful examination reveals that Russians are beginning to recognize the detrimental effects of the conflict on their nation's politics and economy; however, a sizable portion of the population still exhibits overly optimistic views about the policies of its own ruling class. Since public opinion frequently has a remarkable impact on politics, we believe that the topic discussed by the author of this essay merits thorough scientific investigation.

The study by Makkonen and Mitze [12] concerns the economic interaction between the European Union and Russia, the effects of sanctions imposed in 2014, and the effects of war on scientific cooperation. The authors express a certain degree of pessimism about the effects of economic sanctions and consider the decline in scientific contacts to be an insufficient measure to curb the aggressor. The article by Coker [13] is philosophical and historical in nature. The work analyzes the causes of the war from the point of view of European history after the Second World War. The author accuses European politicians of failing to assess the scale of the change in the geopolitical situation and failing to build a strategy to prevent possible political conflicts in the region. The scientific paper by Manboah-Rockson et al. [14] addresses the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war on African relations. Based on the results of the vote at the UN General Assembly in March 2022 condemning Russian aggression, the authors draw conclusions about the future of African countries' relations with Russia.

When analyzing the scientific literature on geopolitical conflicts, attention should also be paid to scientific studies of regional conflicts that have occurred with varying degrees of intensity in the world political arena. It is nearly impossible for a researcher to cover all of the material on the Arab-Israeli conflict throughout an academic career. A significant volume of publications concerns the situation in the Balkans, the Middle East, Indo-Pakistani relations, and other conflict areas [15, 16, 17]. For example, the article by Hu and Meng [18] deals with the Taiwan issue and presents the Chinese perspective on this acute political conflict. The Taiwan issue in the study is examined in the context of relations between the People's Republic of China and the United States, and the American side is blamed for the escalation of the conflict. In general, the issue of bias among scientists from countries involved in political conflict deserves special attention, since in this case it is not only a matter of scientific impartiality but also of the author's civic position and personal reflection on the political problem.

Concluding the literature review, it should be noted that the chosen topic of geopolitical conflicts is one of the most developed in political science. However, a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the causes, factors, and forecasting of the consequences of geopolitical conflicts is still required. Such analysis should be based on an unbiased approach to the study of political risks and threats.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Both general theoretical and primarily political research methodologies were used in this academic paper. These include the structural-functional approach, which describes the elements of geopolitics as a system and reveals the characteristics of the interaction among its structural parts, and the systemic approach, which characterizes geopolitics as a global system. The behavioral approach, which examines the motivations of politicians and political actors in geopolitical conflicts, and the functional and institutional approaches, which determine how major political actors, international organizations, and other participants in international political relations interact, are also used as specifically political science approaches.

3. RESULTS

The Russian-Ukrainian war has heightened attention to geopolitical conflicts as an urgent issue in addressing security challenges. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the essence and nature of such conflicts and to determine how they differ from local or regional tensions between states.

International conflicts have accompanied the history of humankind. The world is constantly involved in a wide range of conflicts across different regions. However, there are a number of conflicts that have a direct impact on the threat of economic crisis, the decline in the growth rate of international trade, environmental, food, and humanitarian crises, and problems related to the existence of a sustainable model of world order.

The period of globalization was accompanied by the introduction of a world market with a free flow of capital, technology, and labor. Transnational corporations gained global importance and contributed to the spread of scientific and technological progress. However, this trend was called into question by the global crisis of 2008 and by a number of geopolitical conflicts that accompanied it.

These conflicts have far-reaching consequences, involving many parts of the world, from Europe to the Middle East

and many Afro-Asian countries. These include the Russian-Ukrainian war, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, geopolitical competition between the United States and China, and the challenges of the Global South [19].

It is worth noting the destructive role of Russia in global politics. The establishment of V. Putin's personalized authoritarian regime was accompanied by an increase in Russia's aggressiveness in international politics. Putin's Munich speech in 2007, in which he criticized the unipolar world and emphasized the need to correct the "historical mistake of 1991", was perceived as a message to the West about the inadmissibility of removing Russia from leadership positions in the world [20]. The war in Georgia, supported by the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, became the practical embodiment of the new Russian strategy. This conflict became, in essence, the first European war of the twenty-first century.

Table 1. *Current global conflicts*

Location	Essence of the conflict
Europe	
Russian-Ukrainian war	It began with the annexation of Crimea and the escalation of tensions during the Revolution of Dignity; the largest geopolitical conflict of modern times has caused a series of humanitarian disasters.
Balkan conflict	It is the result of ethnic conflicts, especially between Serbia and Kosovo; Kosovo's declaration of independence remains one of Europe's most bitter conflicts.
Eastern Mediterranean conflict	It refers to the confrontation between Greece and Turkey. It has ancient historical roots and is manifested in disputes over territorial waters and exclusive economic zones.
Migration and border security	It is the result of mass migration from the Middle East and North Africa. It has caused a political crisis in the EU, with Italy and Greece suffering from the influx of migrants, which puts the security of state borders on the agenda.
Middle East and Southwest Asia	
Southern Mediterranean	It concerns the Libyan crisis, the continuation of the civil conflict, and the de facto division of the country.
Arab-Israeli conflict	It concerns the partition of Palestine and the existence of the state of Israel; it has ancient roots, periodically escalates militarily, and remains a significant source of tension in the region.
Persian Gulf	
The Iranian issue	It concerns Iran's announcement of a nuclear program, Iran's support for anti-Israeli proxies in Arab countries, and the confrontation between Iran and the United States.
Confrontation between Iran and Saudi Arabia	It refers to political tensions in the region, manifested through proxy conflicts in Yemen and Syria.
Civil war in Yemen	It is the conflict between the Houthi rebels and the internationally recognized government, which is supported by a coalition led by Saudi Arabia; it has led to a serious humanitarian crisis.
Asia	
Conflict between India and Pakistan	It is caused by acute political confrontation in the province of Jammu and Kashmir. It is characterized by the periodic escalation of political relations and the periodic use of conventional weapons on the border.
Conflict in the China Sea	It concerns a number of countries involved in the conflict, including Japan, South Korea, China, and Malaysia. It periodically erupts into political conflicts, causing an arms race in the region. Currently, the Taiwan issue is at the forefront.
North and South Korea conflict	It is the result of the Korean War, complicated by the DPRK's nuclear program, which leads to political tension in the region.
Africa	
Civil war in Somalia	It is the result of acute confrontation on ethnic and religious grounds.

Source: compiled by the author based on materials from [21].

China also appears to be becoming another source of global conflicts. The Chinese economic miracle has lifted millions of people out of extreme poverty; however, it has also provoked the growth of ambitions among the Chinese leadership. China's claims to the role of global leader have caused sharp confrontation with the United States, which is manifested in periodic trade wars, China's technological breakthrough in the field of new technologies, and the advancement of Chinese positions in regions where European countries, the USSR, and the United States were traditionally strong. The new conflict is taking on the character of a new "Cold War", with two new superpowers competing in politics, economics, ideology, and the arms race. China's Great Silk Road initiative puts on the agenda a revision of existing economic relations in favor of the PRC.

The third factor influencing the emergence of new geopolitical conflicts and the aggravation of existing ones is the destruction of the Yalta-Potsdam system of world order. Based on the consequences of the Second World War and the

bipolar world, this system had already collapsed during the period of perestroika in the USSR, when the Cold War ended [22]. Attina [23] analyzed three theories of the transition of the world order system: the school of hegemony theory, the school of power transition theory, and the argument of interconnected regional orders of the school of regional studies. For the author, it is obvious that the destruction of the existing system of world order is the source of all modern problems: ecological degradation and climate change, danger in cyberspace, increased mobility and migration of people, as well as all problems caused by the increased permeability of state borders. As can be observed, the new wave of global conflicts is a consequence of the influence of global factors of a political, economic, and social nature.

We propose to determine the number and location of international global conflicts in Table 1.

It can be observed that most geopolitical conflicts have ancient historical roots and are the result not only of political confrontation or interstate tension but also of various additional factors, including ethnic, religious, ideological, and other dimensions.

Let us trace these and other conflicts in terms of their impact on international relations in Table 2.

Table 2. *Conflict resources and their impact on international relations*

Conflict	Participants	Influencing factors	Level of influence on the global security situation
Russian-Ukrainian war	The Ramstein coalition and the “axis of evil”: Russia, Iran, China	Militarization of NATO’s eastern borders; conventional arms race; the problem of refugees from Ukraine; Russia’s cyber war against European countries	Extremely high
Tensions in the Middle East, conflict in the Gaza Strip	Iranian proxies in the form of militarized groups in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq; Israel; the USA	Significant human losses; reputational losses for Israel on the international stage; loss of trust in the region toward the USA	High
Taiwan conflict	PRC; the USA; Taiwan government	Escalation of conflicts in the South China Sea with the participation of other countries in the region; construction of a new model of Chinese hegemony in the region, which may affect the interests of other countries	High; there is a threat of military conflict
African political tensions	Participants in the confrontation in Sudan and countries with border conflicts	A fierce struggle for resources; a power vacuum being filled by militarized structures such as the Russian Wagner Group; hybrid wars	Fairly high

It should be noted that the table presents geopolitical conflicts with a high or fairly high level of danger for the world community. This indicates general political instability caused by the destruction of the existing system of world order and the formation of prerequisites for building a new one. Considering the issue of increasing the risk of global conflicts at the philosophical level, Scheffran [24] speaks of the Anthropocene crisis, which is influenced by international and global conflicts. The global nature of geopolitical conflicts is a consequence of numerous constraints, including ecological, economic, social, political, scientific, and technical constraints, as well as the encounter with numerous crises, conflicts, and disasters.

4. DISCUSSION

The analysis of geopolitical conflicts indicates their destructive nature for the world community. These conflicts become the source or trigger of numerous economic, social, environmental, and humanitarian problems. Their main threat to the world is the danger of a global war that could be waged with the use of weapons of mass destruction, primarily nuclear weapons, which would call into question the very existence of life on Earth. Accordingly, the world community faces the urgent task of resolving and moderating these conflicts in order to reduce the level of global political tension.

The main obstacle to the peaceful resolution of geopolitical conflicts is the level of violence and brutality present in each of them. There are more than 1.5 million soldiers on the Russian-Ukrainian front, and daily losses of manpower are measured in hundreds of people on both sides. In the Israeli-Arab conflict, the number of civilian casualties is also measured in the hundreds on both sides. It may seem that a ceasefire on the front and the cessation of terrorist attacks against Israel could resolve the issue of de-escalating the conflict. A Russian-Ukrainian truce may appear to be near, judging by the diplomatic activity not only of the conflict participants but also of the United States and Ukraine’s European allies from the “coalition of the willing”. However, a ceasefire does not eliminate the main cause of the conflict, namely the

aggressive policy of the Russian Federation, which is aimed at restoring the Russian empire on the largest possible scale. In this regard, let us evaluate the position of Nye [25]: “Believing that the United States was in decline, Russia and China changed their own policies. Putin ordered the invasion of neighboring Georgia, and China replaced Deng Xiaoping’s cautious foreign policy with a more assertive approach. Meanwhile, China’s strong economic growth allowed it to reduce the power gap with America”. In his opinion, Putin’s seizure of Ukraine would transfer violence to the countries of Eastern Europe, which are part of NATO. It is clear that a simple ceasefire would mean transferring the conflict to another plane: either against another European country of the post-Soviet space or in Central Asia. It seems to us that, under the conditions of the collapse of the international legal system, other factors must come into force that can end the conflict. One of them may be the depletion of the aggressor’s military and economic potential, which will certainly affect its ability to conduct military actions or prepare for them.

In the case of Russian aggression, the only means of stopping military actions and guaranteeing the impossibility of their resumption is the position of NATO and Europe. EU leaders are apparently gradually becoming more confident that Russia’s aggressive policy poses a real danger to European countries, despite the rhetoric of V. Putin, S. Lavrov, and other Russian politicians. The new EU security doctrine provides for the definition of military goals, the production and supply of weapons to Ukraine for its protection, and the strengthening of its own military potential. The change in the EU doctrine comes against the backdrop of a difficult discussion with US officials on the future of NATO. The Directorate-General for Defence should represent the EU in the Ramstein process in order to ensure a coordinated approach once military objectives have been identified. Military assistance could, in principle, be enshrined in the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement [21].

Mampuyts et al. [26] have identified possible scenarios for the further development of the Russian-Ukrainian confrontation. In their opinion, Europe must reorient itself. At the heart of this reorientation must be the realization that politics can no longer be shaped from the comfort of a favorable world order, namely one in which prosperity, security, and values are relatively easy to reconcile. European countries will increasingly face difficult choices, and while the new geopolitical situation also offers certain opportunities, events are primarily shaping a world that is becoming increasingly turbulent and uncertain.

There is still no clearly defined scenario for resolving Asian conflicts. The position of the DPRK is difficult to adjust, despite the attempts of leading world countries to influence the easing of political tension between the two Korean states. The Taiwan issue has continued for quite a long time and demonstrates the pendulum nature of tension and reconciliation. We hope that the current stage of the conflict may also tend to fade away.

The Greek-Turkish standoff is linked to the Cyprus conflict, which is moving toward a compromise in the common interests of all parties, thereby creating a basis for progress in the EU integration project. If successful, this should also allow progress in the Libyan case, since Turkey fears being deprived of access to the energy resources of the Eastern Mediterranean and has not ratified UNCLOS. Politically, progress in Cyprus depends on progress in the Black Sea, reconciliation in Thrace, and the treatment of the Christian minority in Turkey, as well as on a minor dispute in the Aegean Sea.

The Arab-Israeli conflict remains difficult to resolve, with no easy scenarios for its settlement. The 12-day war and the conflict in the Gaza Strip are evidence of the inflexibility of the positions of the parties to the conflict. Numerous attempts to ease tensions between the parties, including the use of the UN and humanitarian measures toward the Palestinians, have shown that humanitarian actions alone will not solve this problem. Israel seeks cooperation with neighboring states; it is interested in recognition by Arab states and encourages diplomatic and political methods of resolving crisis issues. The October 7 attack showed that there is room for progress, but this progress has its limitations and reservations.

Batok [27] suggests that conflict participants and leading countries should engage in geopolitical scenario planning, which involves a proactive approach to identifying, assessing, and mitigating geopolitical risks, and that this process will help strengthen resilience. However, the loss of the UN as a universal platform for developing a unified approach to global security issues deprives the idea of geopolitical planning of an effective platform for cooperation. Russia’s blocking of all initiatives to end the war in Ukraine in the UN Security Council shows that superpowers can ignore both the UN and the basic foundations of international law created within this organization. One may consider scenarios of collective interaction among the world’s major countries: the USA, China, the EU, Russia, Japan, and India. These scenarios may include global and regional diversification of risks.

The United Nations, its member states, and regional organizations should strengthen their cooperation and use diplomatic tools for the peaceful resolution of current conflicts. At the same time, reform of the UN, especially the Security Council, is necessary in order to give this organization new dynamism in resolving geopolitical conflicts. Trebyn [28] outlined possible directions for reform, the difficulties of making political decisions through UN structures, and existing UN reform projects in light of modern geopolitical problems.

One of the options for resolving global conflicts may be political globalization, understood as a constructive dialogue among all participants in the global political process. Participants in conflicts should understand that political confrontation harms, first of all, the participants in the conflict themselves: it causes irreparable losses to the economy, weakens the “soft

power” of these states, and undermines their ability to provide themselves with critically important resources. Kravchuk and Badiuk [29] emphasize that this is the most acceptable option for resolving global conflicts in the civilized world. However, the author agrees that, at the present stage, there is no fully effective solution to geopolitical tensions.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The current political situation is characterized by a high level of political instability, which results in powerful political and military conflicts that can be characterized as geopolitical. These conflicts have different natures and relate both to territorial disputes and ideological struggles; they are also consequences of long-standing historical regional or local conflicts.

Geopolitical conflicts are characterized by a high level of tension, have an extremely negative impact on the global economy, and can cause a global economic crisis. Countries involved in high-intensity geopolitical conflicts experience excessive levels of violence, humanitarian catastrophe, and mass migration from war zones. For other countries, geopolitical conflicts also have negative consequences due to a decline in economic activity, a poor investment climate, and insufficient predictability of political and economic consequences. An important consequence of geopolitical conflicts, in particular Russian aggression in Ukraine, is an arms race, in which countries sharply increase spending on their defense potential.

The main factors influencing the intensification of geopolitical conflicts are the destruction of the bipolar world, the emergence of regional leaders striving for global political dominance, and the disruption of the global balance of power. At the very core of global conflicts should be the civilizational confrontation between the West and the East; however, in practice, it has transformed into a series of regional and local conflicts, each of which can escalate into a global war for the survival of humanity.

The world community does not have an easy scenario for overcoming global conflicts. Some of them, for example, those in the African region, can be resolved by encouraging large-scale reforms, providing humanitarian aid, and increasing the efficiency of national governments. Others, for example, the Russian-Ukrainian war, can be resolved only by creating a united front of European countries against the aggressive policy of the Russian Federation and by providing effective security guarantees for all European countries.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data supporting the findings are available from the corresponding author upon request.

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