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**Global Security in the Absence of a Balance of Power:
The Importance of Inter-regional Co-operation**

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Abstract

In the absence of a global balance of power, *regional* stability and comprehensive *inter-regional* co-operation, ensuring the sustainability of the former, are indispensable for the future emergence of a *multipolar world* order. The co-ordination of security policy between geopolitically vital regions such as the Caucasus and the Middle East may help to reactivate the system of *collective security* within the United Nations Organization, which has been increasingly threatened by unilateral action and/or “coalitions of the willing.” For a “New World Order” to be just and balanced, and thus *peaceful*, it must be more than a parallelogram of forces between sovereign actors (states) who take their decisions unilaterally and without consideration of the consequences within the wider regional context. If peace is to be preserved globally, the system of international relations has to be backed up by a “commonwealth of regions” wherever the geopolitical constellation makes such co-operation feasible. A regional security system between the Caucasus and the Middle East will be a case in point.

No balance of power has emerged yet since the collapse of the post-World War II system of international relations. While the bipolar system of the Cold War era undoubtedly was the main reason of the paralysis of the United Nations Security Council, preventing it from exercising its mandate in the field of collective security, the rivalry between the period's two major players also served as a barrier to abuses of power by individual countries.

Almost two decades since the end of the East-West conflict, it is a well documented fact that the unipolar power constellation in our era of "globality" has led to a serious erosion of the system of collective security as it has been advocated, though imperfectly practiced, by the United Nations Organization. It is an iron law of power politics that a country in the position of global hegemon cannot be induced to act in conformity with international law, and in particular with United Nations rules and resolutions, by mere reference to those rules. In a situation in which there exists no incentive for the major global player(s) to go beyond the narrow scope of the "national interests," the legitimacy of multilateral institutions such as the United Nations is increasingly threatened. The signs of anarchy at the global level should surprise no one who is aware of the destabilizing impact of the most influential country's lack of preparedness to "play by the rules." The events that unfolded since March 2003 are clear proof of this trend which jeopardizes the international rule of law.

The question we specifically have to ask when making an assessment of the long-term implications of this obvious paradigm change in international politics is what impact such a reorientation will have on regional security:

First of all, unlike in the bipolar era, regional conflicts are not anymore the playground among rival superpowers – although, it has to be admitted, regional tensions continue to be impacted by the diverging (or conflicting) interests of outside powers. Unlike during the Cold War era, regional tensions do not carry the risk of triggering a global (potentially nuclear) war.

Secondly, in sharp contrast to the previous era, regional conflicts are now even more prone to unilateral interference – since the global hegemon may be tempted to act as "guarantor of peace" according to a constellation of interests that is defined by this power alone (without consideration of the positions of other states or intergovernmental organizations). This trend is evidenced in the recent development of the "peace initiatives" related to the Israeli-Arab conflict (particularly since the Madrid Conference of 1991), but

also in the turmoil in the wider Middle Eastern region that was caused by unilateral actions (more bluntly: acts of armed intervention outside the framework of the United Nations) aimed at implementing the vision of a so-called “New Middle East.” Naturally, the decision on engagement in a specific region exclusively depends on the global hegemon’s (unilateral) assessment, i.e. a definition, by that country itself, of its geopolitical interests that is constantly evolving and not tied to norms agreed upon by the international community.

Thirdly, we have to be aware of a destabilizing consequence of this unipolar power constellation that is almost unavoidable: namely the exposure of regions to external influences in a manner that leaves considerably less room for independent action by regional countries – unless the regional structure is highly developed at different and interdependent levels (as in the case of the European Union’s multi-level co-operation in the economic, political, social and cultural fields).

However, in spite of its rather advanced regional – and in certain respects supranational – status, the European Union has also fallen victim to the global hegemon’s maxim of *divide et impera*, as has become obvious even to the most optimistic observers in the course of the events preceding the Iraq invasion of 2003. In regions with less advanced organizational structures – or less cohesion – than the EU has achieved, such a development may occur even more easily and with more serious consequences for regional stability and security.

How should the members of what nowadays is euphemistically called the “international community,” and in particular smaller countries, react to this new geopolitical constellation – especially when their sovereignty (external as well as internal) is concerned? Several foreign policy measures may be considered as to how countries can deal with this “unipolar predicament” (i.e. the consequences of a unipolar world order for their internal stability and external security):

- (a) The guiding principle of possible reactions to this predicament will have to be focused on the taking of measures to prevent a power vacuum in the respective region. In the absence of a functioning system of collective security, such a constellation would attract outside actors, tempting them to intervene in those countries’ domestic affairs as well as in matters of regional policy. A development that eventually exposes regional

countries to the “animosity” of others will have regional destabilization (with potentially serious repercussions for global security) as ultimate consequence.

(b) Measures under (a) necessitate the strengthening of regional co-operation wherever geographical, historical and economic realities may have brought about what can be described as “common destiny” in a global framework. Such policies, if undertaken systematically, can be seen as contribution to a future multipolar order. (In the larger historical dimension, the present unipolar world order is to be seen as a transitory phase.) This trend is evidenced in the establishment of regional intergovernmental structures or co-operation networks – with different degrees of institutionalization – such as the European Union (EU), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), the Nordic Council, and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), to mention only a few.

(c) If the policies under (b) are to be successful (i.e. sustainable), forms of inter-regional co-operation (co-operation between neighboring regions) will have to be considered with the long-term aim of limiting the “space of hegemonial interference” (geographically as well as in the metaphoric sense). Thus, an intra-regional policy will have to be complemented by an inter-regional co-ordination of policies. An unintended consequence of the widening of co-operation beyond the respective regional scope (towards a kind of “regional multilateralism”) may – eventually – be the improvement of intra-regional stability and co-operation in regions which are affected by crises resulting from bilateral conflicts.

An exemplary case of such a novel form of inter-regional co-ordination are the policies referred to as “Euro-Mediterranean Partnership” (Barcelona Process) and, more recently, what has been proposed in the French President’s “Mediterranean Union” initiative.

(d) When implementing the above-described measures, regional countries must keep in mind an important medium and long-term perspective:

namely giving up (or “phasing out”) membership with military alliances which are dominated by powers from outside the respective region (as in the case of the North-Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO]) – or not aspiring to such membership. While NATO was regional in scope and structure at the time of its establishment, it has undergone a process of major transformation since the end of the Cold War’s bipolar order. The expansion of this military alliance towards a global security organization may have a profoundly destabilizing impact on regional security wherever that organization is going to “unilaterally” expand to. Obviously, such expansion may involve a region’s countries in power struggles which are totally alien to it, making them party of disputes far beyond that region.

Within the framework of these measures, the following basic principles of global security have to be emphasized under the perspective of intra- and inter-regional cooperation:

- (a) *Non-use of force according to Art. 2 (3) of the United Nations Charter:* This implies the commitment of each state to conduct its foreign policy in such a manner as not to provoke others to measures of self-defense under Art. 51 of the Charter. The respect of the rights of other states on the basis of mutuality is the quintessential element of good neighborliness in general and of regional stability in particular. Neither intra- nor inter-regional co-operation can be envisaged unless this principle is fully respected.
- (b) *National sovereignty on the basis of normative (not factual) equality* (according to Art. 2 [1] of the UN Charter): This principle requires the mutual recognition by regional states of rights set out under (a).
- (c) *Collective security in the framework of the United Nations Organization:* The UN’s global policy of collective security has to be emulated at the regional level. In a unipolar framework such as the one prevailing at the moment, the world organization’s effective inability to “enforce the peace” against the will of the most powerful member state has to be compensated by effective regional arrangements (such as those outlined in Chapter VIII of the Charter). Only functioning regional security

arrangements can prevent a further erosion of international legitimacy (which has become the predicament of the United Nations Organization in today's unilateral world order).

- (d) *Re-definition of a state's national interests* (or prioritizing of its strategic goals) in the respective intra- and inter-regional framework: The best antidote to a state's – or region's – falling victim to a policy of *divide et impera* is its proper integration into a regional – eventually inter-regional – system of policy co-ordination on the basis of a realistic assessment of each actor's potential. National sovereignty cannot be exercised – and preserved – in isolation from the respective regional constellation.

Strategic action, based on these principles, will bring about a substantial transformation of the system of collective security in today's unipolar framework. We would like to draw attention to the following aspects:

- Inter-regional co-operation and co-ordination of policies will reduce the “incentive” for interference by powerful external actors (superpowers) in a region's affairs, thus gradually eliminating the rationale behind interventionist policies (that have witnessed a remarkable revival under the conditions of the “New World Order”).
- Inter-regional co-operation may also breathe new life into the (almost defunct) provisions of Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter concerning regional security arrangements. The importance of the principle of subsidiarity in international security matters must not be underestimated.
- The detrimental impact of global hegemony (in more abstract terms: unipolarity in terms of power relations) upon international peace and security will be substantially reduced in a constellation in which neighboring regions in geopolitically sensitive areas (e.g. the Mediterranean, Caucasus, Middle East, South-East Asia) are able to define a *realm of common interests* (even if only in a loose and informal manner). To limit the opportunities for hegemonial interference – which, since the end of global bipolarity, has seriously eroded the United

Nations' system of collective security – should indeed be a major strategic goal of inter-regional co-operation.

- It is to be hoped that the formation of regional organizations, in tandem with new forms of inter-regional co-ordination, will be the beginning of a gradual transformation of the present *unipolar* towards a *multipolar* system of power – which alone will enable adequate and effective mechanisms of collective security beyond the area covered by the regions. Regional arrangements are not of a mere *complementary* nature; no functioning system of *international* security can be envisioned without an ever expanding network of regional co-operation – ideally covering the entire globe.

The United Nations' system of collective security should rely on regional structures (as outlined in Chapter VIII of the Charter) wherever a “*commonwealth of regions*” (a form of co-ordination of policies covering at least two regions) is taking shape. Under the prevailing adverse circumstances (post-September 11, 2001 and post-Iraq war 2003), whatever is left of multilateralism can only be preserved if the principle of subsidiarity is implemented also in matters of security policy, i. e. at the international level. Thus, “multilateralism” is to be backed up – and made sustainable – through “regionalism.”

Even if it may appear as a remote possibility at the present moment, a regional security system for the countries of the Caucasus (specifically: the Southern Caucasus) and the Middle East would be a case in point of such a realignment of international relations on the basis of subsidiarity – and could be a cornerstone of a future multipolar order that will incorporate advanced forms of *trans-regional* (inter-regional) organization. In view of what is at stake at the global level, it is definitely a goal worthy of further serious consideration.
