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THE TRIANGLE OF POWER

REBALANCING THE NEW WORLD ORDER

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Part One

Order

From Order to Disorder

January 1990. Furman University, Greenville, South Carolina. I have abandoned my first major, economics, and my golf scholarship to immerse in a new obsession: political science and international relations. I study the fall of the Berlin Wall—almost in real-time. We are living history. The outcome is unwritten.

At age twenty-two, I'm hooked. I read everything I can find: books, newspapers, articles faxed from my dad in Finland. Studying the origins of the European Union, I come to believe deeply in international institutions, open society, liberal democracy, market economy, and the essential tenet that states' self-interest must be contained by global rules. As European unifier Jean Monnet said, "Nothing is possible without men [and women], but nothing is lasting without institutions."

In my idealism, I fail to understand that the West's ideological victory is going without global celebration. Many formerly colonized countries see it not as a liberation but an extension of a past they hoped to leave behind.

34 *The lesson the ensuing decades will teach me is that all cultures and histories differ. Interests and power often supersede values. And if we want democratic values to prevail, we must correct our vision.*

In Search of Order

We humans seek order within disorder to make sense of a world that often lacks it. We search for patterns and try to explain—sometimes even predict—how the world is or will become.

Our history books bear evidence of this desire. They are full of epoch-making terms that suggest some sort of order. The Roman Empire and its “Pax Romana.” The Ottoman Empire. The Qing Dynasty. Defining these empires within clear narratives necessarily involves interpretation. But they nonetheless represent something concrete and critical to understand: structures that frame the relationships among populations and governments and offer a sense of coherence. We seek order because we need it.

Evolving from these regional orders came the *British Empire*, the first to extend across the globe. It was a world order, and it defined our sense of the scope of order to this day. Propelled by steam engines, gunpowder, and the telegraph, it ultimately covered almost one-quarter of the earth’s land.

The *Westphalian System*, named after the 1648 Peace of Westphalia in Europe, defined our ideas about the structure of world order. These treaties established the notions of sovereignty and equality of states. World orders across history have centered on economics, trade, or cultural exchanges. But states remain the most important building blocks. Order, in this perspective, does not mean that all states are equal, but that power is distributed and managed among them to provide stability.

The assumptions underpinning our latest world order, of course, no longer apply. To understand the new rules, we need to retrace the upheavals that brought us here—beginning with the Cold War.

From Bipolar to Western Order

The Cold War defined a world that, for the West, felt rather orderly. In its simplest form it was bipolar and ideological. The United States and its allies spoke the language of democracy, capitalism, and freedom. The Soviet Union and its subjects represented autocracy, communism, and control. There was little in between (unless you count the Non-Aligned Movement of 120 states, which was neither orderly nor ideological).

Still, the two superpowers had to get along to avoid mutually assured nuclear destruction. They forged a system of joint and separate multilateral institutions and agreements for both competitive and cooperative reasons. Comecon (the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance), for example, was the Soviets' response to the Marshall Plan. The United Nations served as a joint forum of cooperation and dialogue. An array of arms control agreements aimed to limit the proliferation and use of weapons.

That feeling of order persisted even when the Cold War ended. The bipolar world became unipolar, almost overnight. Many of us, myself included, were rather quick to call the new order Western, driven by the undisputed superpower, the United States. In large part that was true. Yet even amid heady hopes, a sober look at the world would have shown us that weaknesses remained.

In reality, the 1990s were rather messy and disruptive, at least in Europe. War erupted in former Yugoslavia. Germany's

36 reunification was rocky. The EU's enlargement, and the reconstruction of Eastern and Central Europe, took time. Russia's decade-long experiment with democracy and hypercapitalism failed. The seeds of present-day strongman rule in Russia were partly sown in this chaos.

Neither was capitalism the silver bullet to solve all problems, though it felt that way. The pendulum had effectively swung from state to market, control to freedom, authoritarian regimes to democracy. The 1990s Asian financial crisis, however, hinted at the fragility of let-it-rip globalization.

Personally, I joined Finland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs just as Finland joined the EU. Multilateralism held particular appeal for a Finn; hailing from a small country, you seek protection and amplify influence by joining forces with others. And indeed, a Westward pattern emerged as Eastern and Central European countries applied for EU and NATO membership. The choice in Europe felt clear: from disintegration to integration; from spheres of interests and submission to freedom to cooperate; from closed to open societies; from socialism to capitalism; from autocracy to democracy. The transition was imperfect and slow but crucial.

The West, we now see clearly, had an opportunity to solidify Western values around the globe then—but we did not seize it. And the changes made to international institutions were modest and mostly regional, insufficient to match the magnitude of global change.

The renamed Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) added democratization and stronger human rights oversight to its agenda to guide the transition of former Soviet Republics. NATO expanded and shifted focus from

collective defense to crisis-management and peacekeeping. The European Community officially became a Union, integrated further, and more than doubled its membership in the fifteen years after the Cold War. Was it messy? Of course; the pooling of sovereignty between nation-states always is.

Globally, however, the rules of critical institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organization (WTO) did not change. The UN reacted to events, but its power structure remained pretty much the same—only now without a counterweight to the preeminent power of the US and its Western allies. The nations that had been sidelined remained sidelined.

The 2000s—Sliding Toward Disorder

The terrorist attack on New York's twin towers on September 11, 2001, was as tragic as it was symbolic—an attack on the two pillars of the free world: capitalism and democracy. Little did we understand at the time, but it became the moment when the long slide from order to disorder began.

The fight against terrorism became the focus of the US and much of the Western world. The attack's aftermath also revealed signs that the rest of the world would not automatically slide into Westernism—values, norms, and institutions included. 9/11 marked a turning point in what I call the West's "double mistake." One mistake was that we pivoted on our highest message, making security more important than freedom. The second was that, in attempting to direct world affairs, we gave inadequate agency and power to other nations.

The US attempt, with European interventionists such as Britain's Tony Blair, to exact retribution for 9/11 was billed by

38 Western politicians as the beginning of a march to democracy in the Middle East. Instead it marked the beginning of a fall to chaos in the region. Globally, the resulting entropy assured that history would not end then. On the contrary, it was about to begin.

The War on Terror presumed to thwart terrorism by force while exporting democracy to as many places as possible. It was a recipe for instability and potential disaster. Democratic change usually happens from within, rarely from outside, and never through force.

Power continued to decentralize. Talk began about the “rise of the rest” in *The Post-American World*, as Fareed Zakaria titled his 2008 book—suggesting that the real challenge to US power came not from the Cold War’s losers but the winners of emerging economies. China, India, Brazil, Russia, South Africa, Kenya, and many others showed formidable economic growth. Increasingly, the rest of the world wanted a share of power, a say in the institutions setting the rules of globalization.

Meanwhile, these shifts outpaced the ability of existing international institutions to adapt to them. Much of the unease and disorder in current global affairs is about representation. Essentially: about power. So different coalitions of states, such as G7 and G20, began to challenge more traditional and multi-lateral forms of global governance. Patchwork cooperation was replacing a rules-based order.

As the decade rolled on, the Global West, especially the US and EU, began to look increasingly vulnerable. The US-led conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq proved controversial and complicated. The Bush administration aimed to oust the ruling Taliban and, with a NATO coalition, create a new democratic authority to prevent their return to power. Ultimately the Taliban resurged,

the West deployed roughly 140,000 troops in the region, the war killed more than 240,000 people (according to the Costs of War project at Brown University) and displaced some 6 million, and the Taliban again rules Afghanistan.

The Iraq War proved an even bigger blow to the West's credibility, especially the US. The invasion was based on a false assumption that Iraq possessed or was developing weapons of mass destruction—and occurred despite little connection between Iraq and the 9/11 attacks. The protracted conflict had no UN mandate. The superpower that had emerged victorious from the Cold War as a beacon of democratic values did not look so super anymore.

Meanwhile, the EU hardly looked like the epitome of stability either. It did grow, albeit slowly, to twenty-seven member states by the end of the decade. The widening and deepening European integration is one of its great successes. But the EU failed to become the world's "most competitive economy" as planned.

In contrast, when China set forth its quinquennial economic growth plan, it delivered. Much as it disavows a Western-designed order, Beijing has never hesitated to make use of it. Many consider China's decision to join the WTO, gaining access to Western markets, as one of the most important geopolitical events of the century so far. The global financial crisis of 2008 exposed the depth of public debt among some EU member states and plunged the Union into internal division. Europe, like the US, was distracted by its own concerns.

Personally, this decade taught me how to test my international values against the grit of reality. Representing the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs I helped negotiate the Treaty of Nice, which reformed the EU structure for the accession of a dozen new

40 countries. Through tough, long nights in 2001, we negotiated the critical question of any transnational cooperation: how to share power. And we succeeded, strengthening the EU and the states within it. Later, as advisor to European Commission President Romano Prodi, I helped develop the Treaty of Lisbon, which set forth a new EU Constitution more acceptable to member states. And finally, as Finnish foreign minister and OSCE chairman in 2008, I helped broker an urgent ceasefire in Georgia.

The phone call telling me that Russia had violated territorial sovereignty and invaded Georgia literally came when I was by the pool, on a family vacation in Sardinia. By the next day I was en route to Georgia's capital, Tbilisi, with a French delegation. In the heavily bombed Georgian city of Gori, I walked down a side street and stumbled upon women and children streaming out of buses, crying and clutching plastic bags of their belongings as Russian soldiers ordered them out. Russian forces had obviously ripped these Georgians from their homes in areas Russia wanted to claim as its own. That evening, our delegation drafted a ceasefire agreement and secured Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili's signature. An overnight ride in armored vehicles over the mountains to Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, and then an early morning flight delivered us to Moscow, where I met Lavrov. French President Nicolas Sarkozy brought our proposal to the Kremlin, the Russians requested and received one last change, and the deal was done.

In Georgia, we managed to halt a conflict, with minimal loss of life, in just five days, through swift and coordinated international action. Yet the lesson I drew was that disorder was growing and needed to be contained. The rules that we considered sacrosanct could be broken. We needed strong multilateral institutions as much as ever. I tried to ring the alarm bells in

conversations with colleagues across Europe. But the collapse of Lehman Brothers overshadowed Russia's annexation of two Georgian regions, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, as the global financial crisis began. The Global West was looking away and not looking good—opening the door to disorder.

In hindsight it is easy to say the 2000s was a wasted decade for the Global West. The US, having at last acquired all the keys to global influence, failed to stay in the driver's seat. Its financial crisis cascaded into economies across the world. The EU made a mess of the euro crisis and got entangled in internal disputes about who should foot the bill. From the outside the Global West looked arrogant, incoherent, and often inconsistent. Cooperation was fine, as long as it followed Western norms. Solidarity was necessary, as long as it caused no inconvenience at home. And international rules mattered, until they impeded the West's interests.

Nations of the Global South leveled the charge of double standards, which today has grown louder over US support for Israel as its military destroys much of Gaza at the cost of tens of thousands of civilian lives. The West spoke the language of democracy but sometimes acted with the force of autocracy.

By the end of the decade, the rest of the world had turned its back on the Global West. We just failed, or refused, to see it.

The 2010s—Disorder Arrives

The US and EU entered the 2010s in crisis mode. The emerging global sentiment was that democracy, capitalism, and globalization were not delivering. That sense only mounted through the decade as sequential crises sealed the West's fall from first place, sketching the lines of the new triangle of power.